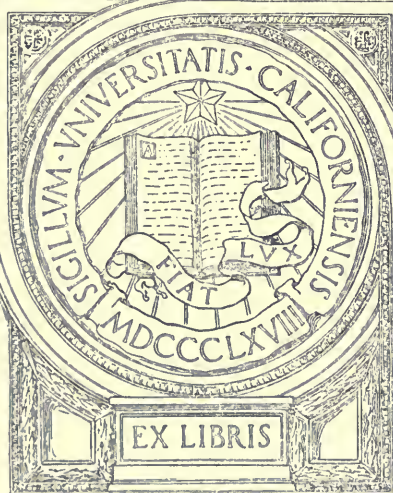




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IN THE MAORILAND BUSH

A WHITE AUSTRALIA IMPOSSIBLE

By E. W. COLE

In crown 8vo, cloth

This book is an appeal from race prejudice in favour of permitting the free entry of Japanese, Chinese, and other coloured races into the Australian Commonwealth. The Author discusses the cause of colour in mankind, gives much valuable and interesting information regarding various Asiatic and African races, shows that all the races of mankind are of a more or less mixed origin, and argues that a white Australia is neither desirable nor possible.



MORNING MISTS

Frontispiece]

IN THE MAORILAND BUSH

BY
W. H. KOEBEL

AUTHOR OF
"ARGENTINA: PAST AND PRESENT," "PORTUGAL: ITS LAND AND PEOPLE,
"URUGUAY," "MADEIRA: OLD AND NEW," "MODERN AR-
GENTINA," "HODSON'S VOYAGE," "THE ANCHORAGE,"
"THE RETURN OF JOE," "THE SINGULAR
REPUBLIC," "THE SEAT OF MOODS."

WITH THIRTY-SIX ILLUSTRATIONS IN HALF TONE



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TO
MY WIFE

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INTRODUCTORY

THE material from which several of the following chapters are composed has already appeared in serial form in the "Globe," "Manchester Guardian," "Academy," and "Graphic." I have to thank the courtesy of the respective editors for its reproduction here. I have also to acknowledge the kindness of the New Zealand Associated Press and of the High Commissioner of the Dominion in permitting the use of the majority of the photographs.

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IN THE MAORILAND BUSH

FACING PAGE

IN THE MAORILAND BUSH

CHAPTER I

THE BUSH AND ITS PEOPLE

IT is bad policy to start a book with a wailing note. A subtle host—there should be as much entertainment within book-covers as upon a table-cloth—will lay out his most sparkling wines first of all, awaiting the period when his guests' palates shall be clogged ere substituting less cheerful vintages.

But how can I refrain from a grumble, even here, when the many white pages ahead are still virginal ? The fact is that a very notable portion of the Empire has a genuine grievance. How does it happen that the Maoriland bush should never yet have found a singer ? There are names in literature that are famous from their mere association with the men and forests, lakes and lands, of Canada, India, and Africa. Reflect, moreover, on the most marked teature of the anomaly ! Australia drew the verse from Adam Lindsay Gordon in a full and clear stream, while a new Zealand poet who can hold the ear of the world still lacks existence.

Now this thing is far more curious than it may appear to those ignorant of both countries. Such folk may well consider it but natural—in view of the great disparity in size of the two lands—that from the blue gums of Australia should have emerged the work of such men as Adam Lindsay Gordon and “Rolf Boldrewood,” while the song of the New Zealand mountains and forests should never have echoed beyond their own shores.

In reality, since romance is not to be measured by the mile, no comparison is possible between the two fields. Without the slightest fear of being called to account for undue partisanship, it may be said that the glamour of New Zealand is infinitely greater than that of Australia. Who lived among the gum trees of the latter ere the advent of the white man? Now that I have written it, the question is obviously couched in an unfortunate form. To the irreverent it will suggest the opossum. Whereas I am referring to the tribes of rather unpoetic natives, the limitations of whose intelligence are narrower than those of the majority of such folk.

It is time to forsake these comparisons in romance, and to turn to the topic of New Zealand alone. And, when we arrive in New Zealand, let it be distinctly understood that no halt is to be made in such towns as Christchurch, Wellington, Auckland, or in any other centre of electric tramways, busy streets, and hot or cold water on tap. No, we will make directly for a small bush township that sits on the

shores of a bay just at the spot where a river, coursing down from the mountains inland, enters the ocean.

It is a short ride from here to the bush. An hour's smart canter will gain the country that is so rich in natural effect and in Maori legend. And when you have once set eyes on it the impression will remain with you : have no doubt on that point !

I have seen tropical forests where the flowers blazed in arrogant pride, and whose trees themselves were painted in bewildering hues of blossom, even down to their trunks from which the orchids hung with all the spendthrift radiance of the parasite. An overwhelming scene this ! As entrancing to the senses in the first instant as would be a draught of honey and maraschino—and as sickly. A purely gorgeous spot of the kind possesses something of the effrontery of the painted woman. Can nature be immoral ? If so, the vice is to be met with in places such as this where the monkeys chatter and the humming-birds flit in the clearings. At the first glimpse it is magnificent ; but familiarity must inevitably breed a suggestion of rankness.

The wonder of the Maoriland bush is of another order. Immeasurably deeper, infinitely more subtle, it is very stately, very silent, breathing out its mystery from every one of its evergreen leafy pores. The very birds have attuned themselves to its mood ; the silence is broken by little beyond the silvery chime of the bell-bird. There are no chatterers in the depths of the bush ; only ghosts, so the Maori says,

and wandering spirits of evil. If so, how can the dreaded things sustain their malice in such soft and dreamy surroundings, amidst the hush of evergreen, tree-fern, and palm, beneath which spreads the thick carpet of maidenhair ?

But this will not do. I am squandering local colour that will have to serve in more active scenes on many later pages. Moreover, the life of the country does not begin and end with the leafage of the bush. There is its human population, and that of the township on the fringe of the ocean. There are its foolish sheep, its wise sheep-dogs, its horses, cattle, and the loves and hatreds of all, irrespective of breed or sex. It is astonishing how much a district holds, to say nothing of a country !

Even in this introductory sketch it is impossible to dismiss the topic of humanity as curtly as that of the lower animals. What type of men are these that live among the forests, peaks, and grass lands of the clearings ? Of them I can give a broad and accurate description at the very outset. They are, in fact, very much like other men. It is but natural that in some respects they should differ from those who dwell in more populous and noisy centres. They have in a marked degree those qualities that go hand in hand with perfect physical health and a strenuous life that holds many moments where disaster can only be averted by instant decision and unshattered nerve.

It may be that the force of association has caused me to rate them too highly. For staunchness,

reliability, and open-heartedness I would put the man of the bush in the same category as the sailor. The two professions have much in common. Each is dependent on a very limited society of his fellow-beings, each has to fend for himself in the hour of need, and neither has the opportunity of displaying his best qualities when arriving in town or port. But the man from the bush has more than these primary virtues, as I hope the later pages will prove.

Of course there are all kinds, even in the bush and in the open pasture land. There are as many lawsuits, boundary disputes, and minor failings here as elsewhere. I for one harbour no delusions concerning the unimpeachable morality of the Antipodes. Why should I? Perhaps these lines will meet the eye of the gentleman who purchased my grey mare on the eve of my departure for England. If so, let me remind him that even now it is not too late for the completion of his share of the bargain. A cheque to Mr. Stanley Paul need fear no rebuff such as that meted out to the foolish virgins! My chestnut and my roan met with a better financial fate, so why should the memory of the handsome grey be condemned to this material oblivion? It was a good mare, and cheap at eleven pounds.

But were the bush docked of its frailties it would be a most uninteresting spot. And here the weaknesses of the universal types are wont to be drowned in an unusually prolific flow of the milk of human kindness. If you leave the country an embittered man, the fault

lies entirely with yourself, and not in the least with the land or its people. The place, in fact, will be well rid of you, and I cannot conceive what other spot would be the gainer.

Since we are giving the ground a preliminary clearing for action, one point should be made clear at the start. A misconception may arise concerning the nature of him whom I have called the man from the bush. In the imagination of the exuberant-minded he may be pictured as a wild man from the woods, crude as a bush pig in costume and manners. A tremendous wide-awake hat will inevitably form part of his garb, and for preference a flaming red shirt. But it would be superfluous to enter into the various popular conceptions of the man who is vaguely imagined as hailing from the back of beyond.

Frankly, it is no more possible to collect his numerous representatives into a single type than it would be to effect a similar feat in the case of the various grades and conditions of townsmen. He may be a landowner, shepherd, or stockman. As any of the three he may bear the name of a well-known family—the prevalence of the younger sons of such is a marked feature in Maoriland—or his origin may be commonplace or quite humble. His manners will be in accordance with his birth rather than with his station in life ; but it may be taken for granted that the behaviour of even the most lowly will bear a favourable comparison with that of the corresponding class at home, although in the first instance a new-

comer may mistake a natural independence for something less admirable.

As to costume, the man from the back-blocks will wear exactly what suits him in the course of his daily work. In the place of the conventional wide-awake, his headgear may be a cloth cap, or even an ancient and battered bowler. The latter I have frequently seen—I admit not without a deep sense of injury to the poetical fitness of things—on the head of a rider galloping desperately amid the most romantic country in the world, while the cattle were charging blindly, and the crashes of the stockwhips echoing across the gullies.

But one has no right to consider costume at such a juncture. The sole business of the hour is with the stock, as the inattentive may find out to their cost. It is only when bound for the township that sartorial matters should occupy the mind. Then, indeed, you will see a transformation from dungaree trousers and worn flannel shirts to a far more brilliant apparel that in many cases is not to be distinguished from the smart costume in which men are wont to hack at home. Let me assure you that we can be dressy on occasion, even in the back-blocks!

Enough, however, of such trivialities for the present. It is a sorry fall from the poetry of the bush to the pattern of a man's tie or the cut of his breeches. The time has come to make for the small township on the edge of the ocean. I will give it no name. Were I to call it by that which it rightfully owns the rash act

would murder any latent possibilities of peace of mind in the author. And it is not worth while to invent spurious nomenclature for the place. It shall remain the township pure and simple. It can be confused with no other, since it is the sole urban centre for many hundreds of square miles inland.

Unless you would spend many days on the road in the saddle it is necessary to approach the place by steamer, for no railway links it with the better-known centres. Moreover, not every steamer will consent to pay a call on the modest little port, and the spot is a little addicted to avenge this slight rather unjustly on those more polite craft that drop their anchors and hoot with their sirens in sociable fashion.

Should the bay chance to be ill-humoured, you may judge the depth of its mood from the height of its combing rollers. Then you will be swung over the steamer's side in a basket just as though your frame were nothing more animate than barbed wire, agricultural machinery, or cases of oil. In this ignominious fashion you will be lowered to the deck of the launch, and in the small craft you will surge upwards and dive downwards in mighty rises and falls. You may grow pale, or you may not: that possibility concerns you alone. But there will be time in plenty for the active workings of Neptune ere the nose of the launch is turned towards the shore.

Then it will enter the river's mouth, and will steam into sudden pleasantness and calm. You will have

arrived at the township that stands sentinel at the gates of the bush.

Ere we actually set foot upon the soil it is necessary to add a word of caution. I began this chapter with a complaint concerning the lack of a Maoriland bard who should sing of the bush and of its folk. Now, that lament was uttered in good faith. That is to say, it was not introduced as a specious prelude to any attempt of my own to fill that gap. There are degrees in rashness ; but none such as this shall be laid to my charge. The sketches and general matter here deal with everyday life, and the sole merit that I can claim for them lies in a certain amount of truth.

CHAPTER II

THE TOWNSHIP

IT is the practice of house-agents to describe the surroundings of a house ere pausing with astonished delight upon the merits of the dwelling itself. And the house-agent must know. Description and a healthy optimism are the essentials of his art. Let us take him as an example, and let us approach the township by means of its surroundings. There is much to commend the method. In actual life there is no other way.

For the purpose of the venture it is necessary to embark at a larger and more imposing port that lies to the southward of our own, and to steam out on the wide ocean. The dawn is upon the sea. The grey that mounts in the sky has already absorbed the Southern Cross, together with its fainter and more brilliant brethren. For more brilliant there are, and in its own hemisphere the great constellation is outshone by many of its neighbours. The confession may savour of iconoclasm, but it has alway seemed to me that, amid the blazing masses of silver light that hang above a Maoriland night, the famous Cross is notable for its sentimental value rather than for its actual brilliancy.



Stuart, Photo]

CARVED MAORI DWELLING



S. B. Smith, Photo.]

A MODEST HOMESTEAD

The ocean is smooth, but the swell is there. The swell, as a matter of fact, is always there. With the first light of day it has rolled in dark, oily mounds. At the rising of the sun the watery heaps glitter with an unbroken sleekness as they come. Striking lazily upon the beam of a small steamer that skirts the shore, they send her twin masts swinging in a broad arc.

The vessel herself is one of those coasters whose course lies in a series of curves that lead outward and inward from point to point. Her ambitions are strictly moderate. She nibbles at those small mouthfuls of passengers and cargo that the larger boats pass by in contempt. Yet her status is very different from that of the grimy and desultory tramp. By her brasswork and paint alone you would know her at once for an official link in a great organisation. She is a perfect miniature liner, from the saloons, cabins, and bathrooms to the display of palms that decorate her companion. It is true that the palm leaves are occasionally wont to sway in protesting shivers as the vessel climbs the dizzy watery heights in a blow, and falls down from them again. Sometimes, indeed, they are taken away to be stowed in some unknown place for their safety's sake, and then you may make certain that few passengers will be left on their feet to notice that the companion is bare of its verdure. Generally, however, they remain, to set their seal upon the standing of the vessel.

The steamer is an "intermediate." It is for this reason that her narrow decks are far less cumbered

with humanity than are wont to be the broader ones of the more pretentious craft. Forward, in the steerage quarters, are a couple of shepherds and their dogs. After many days' driving of sheep the party is returning homeward in comfort and ease. The men form an animated centre to the picture of canine repose that surrounds them. Engrossed in a whole-hearted game of cribbage, they send the cards down with a resounding slap upon the deck, the pungent whiffs of plug tobacco floating aft the while.

On the saloon deck is a sheep-farmer, as bronzed of face as the shepherds. Here, too, are a couple of men who wear the unmistakable air of the town. They are an insurance agent and his accompanying doctor, and, though hailing from no farther away than Sydney, they are obviously strangers here in a strange land.

Along the coast-line, so far as the eye can reach, the massive bluffs raise themselves sheer from out of the water. Here and there a tongue of high land juts well forward into the glittering waters, falling away again to the receding curve of a semi-circle that looms upward in majestic austerity. To the rear of the coastal bluffs the land curves upwards and downwards in bewildering outline. It is as though a collection of vast tumuli had been flung together with a stupendous negligence. Only here and there do the peaks of a defined range stand out in ordered sequence from the rest.

To one who has not yet set foot upon it the majesty

of the coast is apt to appear a little overwhelming. The land stands out as a vision of chaotic exuberance. It is difficult to imagine that within the hidden valleys are mortal beings, ordinary leaders of prosaic lives—or rather of lives that habit and custom have rendered prosaic in their own minds. The fact has not been realised by the Sydney insurance agent, for one. Obsessed by appalling anticipation of work in the saddle amidst these wild peaks, he is eyeing the heaped coast-line with a gloomy and apprehensive countenance.

He has turned to put a diffident question to the station-owner, who happens to be in his neighbourhood. The latter, in response, turns upon him raised eyebrows and a surprised expression. “Not ride there?” he echoes. “Why on earth should you not ride there? Do you want to walk?” The insurance agent, satisfying himself by a glance of the other’s good faith, replies dully that he supposes not. Then he resumes his contemplation with an even more abstracted mien than before.

The vessel has drawn quite near to the shore. In the centre of an inlet, at the foot of a rocky slope, stands a small pier. The steamer worms her way in towards it, and is made fast. Despite the comparative shelter the spot affords, the timbers groan and creak as the heaving boat strains against them. The shepherds, followed by their close procession of dogs, stride landwards here, and disappear in the direction of a few small bungalows, doubtless in quest of the

horses that await them for the continuance of their journey.

A dozen wool-bales are swung inboard from off the pier, and with that concludes the business of this miniature port. The steamer's nose seeks the open waters again, then swings round to continue the northward voyage. The coastal scenery remains much the same; if it varies at all it is in the degree of boldness rather than in type. The rounding of each promontory reveals a further succession of heights ahead. There is one point, however, that separates itself proudly from the landscape, crowning the whole. Far inland, standing out from the mysterious dim blur of the distant ranges, rises a snow-white cone. Obscured now and again by the rising foreground, it reappears in a succession of fresh settings. But the majestic snow-peak remains when the nearer crags, one after the other, have stood out in turn, and have been lost to sight.

All the while the sea has been strangely empty of small craft. Just here there are neither fishing-boats nor minor ocean carriers to break the shining monotony of the waves. Once, indeed, a vessel has been passed. It is a large, three-masted ship, whose soiled sails hang loosely as she rolls in the calm. Her grey sides are rust-stained. She is wearing, in fact, the honourable scars and blemishes dealt out to her in the course of a voyage half round the world.

Ahead of the steamer a tiny, bush-covered island rises from the waves. As it draws abreast it becomes

evident that the trees upon it are stunted, wind-clipped on the one side, spreading on the other. A solitary haunt this, that drinks in all the sunlight, and shudders beneath the uttermost force of the gales when they blow. At present it seems to be awaiting the advent of a Crusoe. Yet through the glasses you may discern a scattering of sheep in an opening of the verdure. Thus you may know that you are already too late for the proper enjoyment of this seeming island of Defoe ; the place represents real estate.

As the topmost tree of this ocean dot sinks beneath the waves the steamer turns landward again, and ploughs her way towards where a headland juts out from the coast. Drawing nearer and nearer, she approaches the bold mass until the white line of foam that stretches along its foot becomes something more than a streak. It is a leaping, dancing thing, that abounds with irregular spurts of life. Now there will be an upward-flung curtain of dazzling white that climbs the cliff's side ; now, with its fall, the turmoil broadens beneath.

One has an unusual sense of fragility as the great headland towers against the blue of the sky above. Even more than the waves does the mass dwarf the vessel. Tossed by the one, obsessed by the other, her frame seems a ridiculously puny and frail thing against that enormous bulk of rock and soil.

It is a secretive promontory, this, one that contains the elements of a vast practical joke. You had made

certain that behind it stretched the usual walls of rock, jutting out sheer from the waters. Nothing of the sort. As the steamer swings round at its base the ground upon the other side sinks downwards until, after a couple of protesting foothills, the slope merges into a spreading expanse of plain. A smiling bay has opened out. It is as a pastoral calm after a mute tempest of nature. To the front is a broad belt of yellow beach. Beyond are clumps of willows and patches of heavier trees. At the farther extremity of the bay are roofs from which the light smoke arises—in fact, we have arrived! But a few minutes' further churning of the screw, and the vessel lies directly opposite the spot.

Now for an attempt at that species of description to which allusion has already been made. You are aware that at this spot the lofty succession of mountains fall away from the water's edge. Just here they recede in an almost perfect semi-circle, while the ocean, taking a bite at the land, eats out a bay the shape of which corresponds with a curious exactitude to the mountain frontiers in the background. Between the peaks and the salt waters stretches a great expanse of smooth, flat land, dotted here and there by the roofs of pleasant bungalows that are set amid the grasses, maizefields, and browsing flocks of well-bred sheep. For the soil here is the richest in the district, and can afford to support no second-rate stock. It is a very fertile plain, wealthy in grasses and plantations. It owns two broad rivers, moreover, that join in the

neighbourhood of the township, and many willow-lined creeks beyond.

On the northern extremity of the plain, just where the mountains come pressing forward again to join the sea, lies the township. The place seems to hover between two widely different landscapes. Some of its houses have climbed the foothills of the mountains, but the great majority repose easily on the plain at their feet. It is in a sense a shy township, since, viewed from any point but the heights on the north, its outlines are softened and for the most part concealed by the trees and verdure that surround and intersect them.

On the oceanward side the outskirts of the place are separated from the beach by a rolling fringe of sand-dunes, from which the coarse grasses sprout. Beyond this stretches the beach, a gloriously wide expanse, firm and shining, as smooth as a yellow billiard-table save where the groups of glittering shells sparkle on its surface.

There is always deep music on this beach ; for even on the stillest day the thunder of the rollers, though subdued, continues unbroken as the great blue hills of water roll lazily inwards to spread their hissing white sheets upon the sands. It was the most beautiful table-cloth she had ever seen, suggested a little mite of a girl who would accompany me sometimes to the beach ; and it was always there, and never used, not even by the fish—which seemed a waste and a shame !

The central portion of the town consists of two parallel streets in which are situated the hotels, offices, shops, banks, and livery-stables. In one of these, too, rises the building that for many reasons represents one of the most important in the place. It is from the club windows that the life of the township reveals itself most fully. Commanding the length of the street as they do, not a Maori squatting on the kerb nor a station hand clanking his single spur can escape observation, any more than can the ladies, busied in the mysterious rites of their shopping, or the movements of the urban notabilities in the course of their business as they pass to and fro beneath the series of wide verandahs that protect the house-fronts.

The life of the township is pleasantly free from the fever of rank bustle. A healthy sense of occupation stamps the comings and goings of its dwellers proper, distinguishing their leisurely movements from the passive ease of the loafer. The evidence of a wide sociability is everywhere. Men in immaculate tweeds shake the hands of others in worn and soil-stained clothes. The Maoris greet their white acquaintances in similar fashion, reserving the affectionate friction of noses for those of their own race. In the bars of the hotels master and men are sharing a friendly "tot," for the atmosphere throughout the street is democratic. But the street is not ubiquitous, neither is its atmosphere. It does not pervade the precincts of the club, for instance, nor the hall where the



APPROACHING THE TOWNSHIP

dances are held, neither does it cross the threshold of the private house.

The New Zealander preserves a very true sense of the fitness of things. The mere degree in occupation itself is neither a stumbling-block nor an aid to social career. There are members of the club here who hold humble enough billets on stations the owners of which would give many of their acres for the privilege of belonging. But ownership and wealth alone do not suffice. The social line of demarcation is subtle and so deeply drawn that it seldom appears on the surface. But it is there, and its dimly accentuated presence is appreciated by all alike.

As is the case in every agricultural country, too, the community is divided into two distinct clans, that of the townsman and that of the squatter. I think, on the whole, that the respect accorded by the townsman to the sheep-farmer is greater than that which he receives in return, which, fundamentally, is as it should be in a country of sheep.

But these distinctions and differences are prosy affairs. We are at present concerned with nothing beyond the life of the township as seen from the balcony of the club. It is from here that you may watch the arrival of those who have journeyed inwards from up-country. In the summer the dust is wont to sit more or less evenly upon all alike. The vicissitudes of winter are wont to leave their mark upon the riders in more definite form.

As they straggle past, making for the livery-stable,

you may judge of the length and direction of the ride by the aspect of the horse. Here is a man, for instance, whose horse's legs as far as the shoulder are caked with mud. You know well enough the road he has travelled, and the mudholes it offers with such mistaken liberality. Then another rider will clatter by, one who bears but few earth-splashes upon his oil-skin. His horses' legs are clean and glistening, the hair plastered down with moisture. It needs no detective's brain to know that he has come from the opposite direction to the first, where the roads are firmer, and the last ford is in the near neighbourhood of the township.

Of course, I am supposing that you are a new-comer to the place. Were you any other, you would know every one of these folk personally, whether notable, notorious, or commonplace, and these feats of discrimination would be superfluous. I had forgotten, on the other hand, that, if a stranger, you would know nothing of the condition of the roads that lead into the town. Perhaps, for the present purpose, you had better become a resident feigning ignorance, or a new-comer pretending to knowledge. It is not for me to advise; the choice will depend on your temperament.

In any case you may rely upon it that a few minutes after the riding past of each station-owner there will sound the chink of a fresh pair of spurs on the threshold of the club. Occasionally, when it is a buggy that has rolled along with ladies beside and

behind the driver, the interval will be rather longer. But the man will appear in the end as certainly as grass grows in the spring.

The club is a powerful magnet ; there is no denying the fact. Its building is the goal of many a hard ride, the ultimate aim of numerous weary hours in the saddle. It is a spot where men come together from a radius of sixty miles and more, a haunt of greetings between beings whom forty leagues of soil may separate at other times. It is a place where notes are compared, where stock, fence-lines, and grasses are discussed, and where sociability reigns supreme. Can you wonder that it attracts ?

At this juncture I will introduce to you none of the notabilities of the club. We shall be returning to the township again from the depths of the bush, and by that time, I hope, the entire neighbourhood will have become more or less familiar. Yet there is one person with whom it is positively essential to be acquainted from the very start. But in no case, having once entered the precincts, could you fail to know Shacker, the steward.

Shacker is a being of superlative wisdom and resource. It is part of his office to become the temporary right-hand man to every member who, arriving from afar, may find himself at a loose end in a quiet season. Shacker is a purveyor of advice, food, news, and beverages. He is also a student of human nature, and guardian angel to the man on festal purpose bent. To pack up a whisky bottle in so artful

a fashion that none would suppose it anything beyond a roll of brown paper is one of his simplest feats.

Minor ruses of the kind are needful at times. The strong virility of the men from up-country needs an outlet now and then, and it seldom fails to find it. On the other hand, there are the women-folk to be considered. Female opinion has always carried tremendous weight in Maoriland—even since the sex has been entrusted with the suffrage! And female opinion is dead against the whisky bottle; hence it becomes this browned sepulchre. I sincerely trust that no mischief will result from the revelation. There is no reason why it should. On the contrary, the gentler sex should feel flattered. It is not everywhere that so much trouble would be taken to spare them the remotest shock. But when the atmosphere of the township inspires such trivialities as this it is time to leave it.

CHAPTER III

“UP-COUNTRY”

THERE is a certain delight in thudding along the powdered summer roads that never fails, although custom may render its appreciation a subconscious one. Given a good mount beneath, fresh from a rest and an unwonted spell of corn-feeding in the stables of the township, there is music in every creak of the saddle leather. It is a pleasant song, this of the saddle, with its accompanying beat of hoofs. So compelling is its rhythm that it could not fail to produce utter drowsiness in less exhilarating circumstances. As it is, the sentiment is purely joyous. What else could emanate from the rapid springings of the great frame beneath the saddle, the scent of the grasses, the odour of the powdered earth, and the brilliant sunshine streaming down from the blue sky ?

You may let your horse carry you as fast as he will over this first stage of the flat-lands. Once within the blue semicircle of the mountains that hem in the plain, his gait will of necessity be varied, and the opportunities limited for this smooth, unbroken progress. For the present the landscape is essentially peaceful and smiling, the rich grasses shaded by willows, eucalyptus, and the curious palm-like tufts that bunch

themselves at the extremities of the branches of the cabbage trees.

The district is fairly populous. Here is, for instance, a bungalow *par excellence*, the abode of a prosperous sheep-farmer. The building is wide and deep, toned to the softest shade of terra-cotta. Its spacious verandahs are smothered in festoons of passion flower, rose, and honeysuckle. Imposing and luxurious, it stands as the head-quarters of the station whose lands spread far and wide in all directions. All has been brought into being with a view to genuine comfort here. The outhouses surround the principal dwelling-place at a very respectful distance ; the baaing of the penned sheep and the shrill barking of the dogs reach the favoured spot in subdued and chastened tones.

The haunts of work and rest are widely separated on this fortunate station. Between the two extend gardens such as only a sun-bathed climate can produce. In between the varied trees and flowering shrubs the geranium glows in brilliant banks and hedges ; the arum lilies scatter their broad blossoms in weed-like profusion, and the verbena spreads itself in prodigal lakes of colour. But, were we to halt in an attempt to enumerate all the blossoms here, we should find ourselves belated in the distant bush.

Beyond the garden lies the orchard, where peach, nectarine, and fig lend their fruit as freely for plucking as do the more homely apple, pear, and quince. In the home paddocks the private hacks, more favoured

than their harder-worked station brethren, roam contentedly, be-rugged and at their ease. To the rear of the homestead a semi-circle of tall pines and blue-gums forms a sheltering screen for the whole.

It is an enviable spot. But the enjoyment of a home such as this is restricted, of course, to the favoured minority of really opulent sheep-farmers. Nevertheless there are a number like it in the neighbourhood, for even the most confirmed agricultural grumbler will confess that the times are not so bad, which means that he is very well content indeed. The owner of this particular place, for one, could not fail to be that. There are hundreds of acres of ryegrass that rises tall and dense, and all but ready for the cutting and for the harvesting of its seed. In the paddocks set apart for grazing the sheep are frequent and fat. What more could the soul of a sheep-farmer long for ?

A mile or so farther along the road is a homestead of another kind. Compared with the former it is humble to the point of insignificance ; yet it is by no means without its fair share of homely comfort and modest beauty. The bungalow is small, certainly ; the verandah is narrow ; the boards throughout the house are roughly set, and the paint with which the walls are smeared is of a useful rather than an ornamental tint. Yet it is evident even from the highway that there is no lack either of kitchen appliances or of general furniture. And if no rose or passion-flower shower their blossoms over the walls,

it is probably because a spreading vine, that a little later on will strain its branches beneath the weight of the grape-bunches, leaves no place vacant for the more showy but less useful creepers. Indeed, the immediate setting of the small building is as delightful as could be imagined. For, although the fencing draws its rigid line in close proximity, there yet remains ample room for shade-trees, vegetables, flowers, and fruit.

This is the dwelling of a cockatoo farmer, the humble agriculturist who makes the most of his thirty or forty acres of land, and who employs his spare time in working for pay on the neighbouring large stations. He too has remarkably little cause for dissatisfaction with his lot. In England, his home would be a two-roomed cottage, and his wages a pound a week. Here he is his own master for the most part of his time, and the servant of another only when he chooses, and the financial profit is at least thrice that of what he might expect at home.

We are taking a long time to get to the bush, I must admit ; yet it is best to notice what lies by the roadside as we go. There are many bungalow homesteads on these plains. One or two are as imposing as the first that was passed ; others are on a smaller scale, lacking some of the more elaborate finishing touches ; while yet others are the property of cockatoo farmers with the characteristic appearance of the type.

Here and there, though, are homesteads that are notable for certain peculiarities of their own. They



N.Z. Gov. Tourist Dept. Photo.

PEAKS AND FOREST

are of no greater size or pretensions than those of the lesser agriculturists, yet they are surrounded by a spread and glow of bloom striking enough to provoke the envious desire of many a far wealthier neighbour. But these gay blossoms possess a deeper significance than that of mere æsthetic luxury. Strictly speaking, they are not tended for the pleasure of the eye at all. They have their commercial, everyday use, for their owner is a bee-farmer, and this glorious blaze a portion of his stock-in-trade.

And now, at last, we have done with the plains ; with their homesteads, pastures, and people. Directly to the front rises the barrier of foothills, like cliffs from a green sea, with the mountains dimly seen at their back. We have arrived at a notable spot, for before us extends Bray's Hill. Judged by the mere ethics of landscape, there is very little in the appearance of Bray's Hill that would lead the stranger to suspect that any peculiar interest was centred in its slopes. Indeed, a new-comer would be hard put to it to distinguish the spot from many of its fellow hills that make a wide and lofty ring about the semi-circle of plain.

Nevertheless Bray's Hill, both geographically and sentimentally, is an important place. Its bold green flank is pierced by the road—the highway that starts where the distant houses of the township prick out from their green surroundings at the edge of the blue ocean, and that has cut its thin white line across the level plain, until it comes to clamber its winding

way up the side of the hill, and to be lost to view amidst the valleys and peaks of the bush country that stretches to the rear. But this particular spot represents more than the point where the plains end and the mountains begin. Bray's Hill is a vital place in a world of comings and goings ; it is, in fact, a haunt of psychological moments.

It is here that the incoming man from the back-blocks catches his first glimpse of human habitations in clusters. The change of scene has been effected with an astonishing rapidity. One moment his horse has been bearing him upwards through a land hemmed in on all sides by bush, and peaks, and great slopes ; the next, he has passed through the natural gateway that crowns the last hill, and beneath him is spread the panorama of the plain. It seems as though one might fling a stone, and reach with it those tiny dwellings below, were it not for fear that the pebble might crush in a roof or two of the toy-like structures. It is the brilliant air that is responsible for delusions such as these. In reality the horse's hoofs will have to thud over nearly a score of furlongs ere those doll's-houses will have grown to normal size, and ere the few ant-like specks crawling over the flat surface of the ground far beneath will have become riders mounted on cantering horses.

If the rider be alone he will not fail to drink in the panorama to the tune of a quickening pulse. It is possible, though, that he may be journeying in company, the exigencies of which forbid any leisurely

appreciation of landscape. He may be riding at the tail of a flock of sheep or of a mob of cattle, in which case his eye will be warily fixed on the moving fleeces, or on the waving horns and the red, white, and dun backs. For the vagaries of driven sheep and cattle are inexplicable and not to be foreseen, and the results of a successful “ break-back ” are wont to be lamentable in loss of both time and temper. Even here Bray’s Hill remains a landmark of the fullest significance. The end of the journey is in sight. Only a few hours more will see the livestock safely at their destination and a larger balance at the bank to the credit of their present owner.

But all this is concerned with only one aspect of Bray’s Hill. There are few who go to the township by the side of the sea and fail to return. As a matter of fact, it is on the homeward way that the place attains its greatest importance as a landmark. I have already referred to the attitude of mental irresponsibility that a visit to the township induces in some. It must be admitted that the sudden coming together of sociable atoms from all parts of the district is trying to the best-ordered temperament. A few may cast their eyes on the whisky when it is yellow.

Even so, there is very little harm done, as a matter of fact. The thing may occur only four times in the year, and therefore claims every right to the privileges of an exception. In the case of others it is different, of course, but to these I am not referring just now.

If a bachelor has suffered from one of these exceptional periods it may be left to his conscience to reproach him. If a married man, it is certain that his own conscience will be actively assisted by a similar force in skirts that will sit at his side in the buggy on the homeward way.

There is no doubt that the pointing-out of error is a reasonable, commendable, and even a charitable act. It can be effected in various ways. Strangely enough, I have never yet discovered one of these that was received with genuine and hearty appreciation by the culprit. The latter has a curiously impracticable idea that if he acknowledges his fault the matter should end with the admission. Whereas the wife knows quite well that it is only at this point that it should begin.

It must be admitted that mankind occasionally employs unfair strategy in order to avoid that which, after all, is nothing more arduous than the rôle of listener. From time to time you may meet with some evidence of this on the outskirts of the township. On such occasions you may see a buggy, drawn by two galloping horses, speeding furiously along the level road that leads from the spot. The pace is certainly an amazing one for the mere home-coming of husband and wife.

But there is method in the driver's madness. Subdued by the stress of this wild career, the woman is perfectly silent. Otherwise she would have much to say. Now, you know, this sort of thing is not quite

fair. It is not even wise, for this indirect muzzling is only effectual for a time. One might entertain more sympathy for the man, were it not that the utmost success of his procedure can only result in the putting off of the evil hour.

It is at Bray's Hill that retribution falls. No mortal horses can mount the ascent here at any other than a walking pace. Bray's Hill stands for the deluge, all the more overwhelming for its long-pent-up force. The spot represents the endless story of the world, the ultimate triumph of woman over man. It is sacred to moments of rue, and to the fire of purification, while the horses plod steadily upwards. At the best of times Bray's Hill is a long hill; but there are occasions when it seems longer than others.

Perhaps I am entering too deeply into matters that by rights partake of the nature of family secrets. In any case, we have topped Bray's Hill now, and can leave its atmosphere behind us. All about are the peaks and valleys, the white specks of grazing sheep on their sides. The road dips, and falls, and winds, now leading through the ford of a miniature stream across which the horse plunges at a canter, striking up sheets of sparkling water into the sunlight, now fringing the steep sides in the shape of a boldly conceived cutting, now spreading out over a level stretch dappled with the white blossoms of the tetre.

And then comes the bush itself! The horse is

thudding along a cool and exquisite aisle of verdure. The great trunks of the lofty forest trees are smothered and hidden by the undergrowth that presses in rich green waves of handsome leafage to the edge of the narrowing track, while, above, the roof of foliage is impenetrable. Here and there, where an opening in the foliage permits the sight, are glimpses of graceful nikau palms, and spreading tree-ferns, and the thick carpet of maidenhair beneath. It is fairyland, deepened and rendered more wonderful by its solemn hush.

There are many miles of it, and each is as perfect in its sylvan beauty as the last. Then the greenery to the front is illuminated by a blaze of sunlight. The green waves recede as the track sinks down the side of a gorge. A minute later the horse's hoofs are splashing in the waters of a river whose rippling current hastens onwards in its summer shallowness. Save where the ground slopes down towards the ford on either hand the banks of the river rise in sheer walls of rock, heavily hung and festooned with trees, shrubs, and creepers. It is very majestic, sufficiently awe-inspiring to take away the breath for a moment or so of him who beholds it for the first time in this unexpected fashion.

The bush has closed in again, and the last murmurs of the river have died away. After a while the horse shies with a frantic start that sends his hindquarters into the mass of leafage. Just ahead is a Maori on his wiry pony, who has swung suddenly into sight

from round a jutting promontory of green. The big fellow grins broadly, gives out a hearty “ Tenakoe ! ” in greeting, and has passed from sight.

Onwards through the walls of bush, and the clearings, open stretches, streams and rivers ! What if we have to ride for five or six hours or more ! Distance is nothing in Maoriland provided that horse and rider are fit and happy. Not quite so happy at the end of the journey as at the beginning, for all that. With the loss of the full spring in the action of the horse comes the sympathetic lessening of the man’s vitality. There is a point, when three-quarters of the journey have been accomplished, that makes the thought of the homestead a blessed one.

That point has been reached even now, and passed ! The mount has taken all four legs in charge of his equine soul, and is cantering as he has not cantered since he left the livery-stable in the township. He knows. A couple of minutes later he has entered a clearing. In the midst of it rises a small slab-built, Noah’s - ark - shaped erection. By no stretch of imagination could you call the building an imposing one. Perhaps its most salient feature is a single iron chimney placed at one end in the form of a flattened lime-kiln, and seemingly altogether out of proportion to the size of the dwelling it serves.

No, I fear that the shanty can hold out no claims whatever to orthodox beauty. Were you to see it in the midst of a town it is possible that you might even condemn it as an eyesore. Placed where it is, you

bear no other sentiment towards it but a wholesome affection. It is a homestead ; is not that enough ?

The clearing itself in the centre of which the building stands is in a state of transformation that detracts somewhat from the natural charm of the place. It is thickly strewn with the blackened stumps of giant trees—a grim warning to the encircling dense forests of the fate that is to be theirs.

You may anticipate a pleasant surprise on entering the building itself. If so, I fear that you will suffer disillusion. It is the home of honourable makeshifts. It is a place where kerosene tins do duty for the more elaborate chairs in vogue nearer the centres of civilisation, and where packing-cases, cunningly contrived, blossom forth into almost every article of furniture of which the modest household may stand in need.

A similar ingenuity prevails throughout. The wool from the newly introduced sheep forms a not inappropriate stuffing for the home-manufactured cushions, and the leaves of illustrated journals serve to increase the crudity of the plank walls. For culinary purposes a camp oven, that is to say an ordinary iron pot swung from a chain over a roaring log fire, together with a couple of saucepans, form the equipment of the kitchen.

You will kindly undertake no risks with the household objects here. Breakage is a serious matter, as will be brought home to you by the sight of the windows, where the paper that serves in the place of the more transparent material will of necessity have



THE FORD

to remain for many a long day ere the damage can be repaired.

Where packhorses form the sole means of transport, the carriage of necessities, to say nothing of luxuries, is no light task. For the well-cut road has died away, and has shrunk into nothingness long ago. All that is here is a thread-like track, struggling for its existence against the onslaughts of the vigorous shoots of young grass that seek to cover its bareness, a faint thing that winds its way, snake-like and timorous, through the heaped logs, fallen trees, and the various hindrances flung out by the yet rebellious virgin land.

Little more is required to complete the picture. Within a stone's throw of the house flows a creek, rippling gently in the summer months, foaming and swollen in the rainy winter. A few rough kennels shelter the half-dozen sheep dogs, while the horses are grazing near by in great content just now. It will be different in the winter. Then, shaggy-coated and mud-besmeared, they will wander uneasily to and fro, and at times will make their way, in the absence of a barrier, to the few boards that constitute the verandah flooring, in an impertinent attempt to seek shelter from the periodical outbursts of pouring rain.

For all that, you need waste neither your contempt nor your pity upon this solitary homestead. It has already afforded some very pleasant hours to its inmates. Moreover, it marks the second stage of the squatter's upward career. Quite near by may be

seen an erection—scarcely a building—half-European, half-Maori *whare*, that was his shelter when first he commenced his battle with the soil. It is a reed hut that sprang into existence on a small open space before a tree had been felled or the earth trodden by the foot of a single sheep.

This second stage will go the way of the first ere long, you may be certain of that. It will stand for nothing more than a remembrance of the past then. With the widening of the owner's cleared lands and the increase of his flocks will arise one of those spacious, soft-tinted bungalows, with its attendant comforts and gardens. It is only for the present that he is tied to the humble little shanty. But neither the reader nor I are under any restriction of the kind. We can ramble at our ease the length of every species of homestead, from this youthful enterprise to the finest and largest building that ever had its foundations in mutton and wool.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEATH OF THE FOREST

THE broad river, innocent of tiny cataracts just here, glides onwards, smooth and unruffled, glistening brightly where the sun plays upon its surface, dark and shadowy where the overhanging wealth of verdure shelters its waters from the glowing light overhead. On either bank rise the rolling waves of the unbroken forest, extending so far aloft that the eye strains high to catch the line of the narrowed horizon.

A few brilliant-hued kingfishers flit low down over the water through sunlight and shadow, and the tui birds, invisible among the leafage, give out from time to time their modulated bell-like notes. Perched on the boughs of the larger trees sit the fat, comfortable pigeons, restful and phlegmatic, with eyes that view the approach of the seldom-seen human being with languid curiosity.

More numerous are the little fantails that dart incessantly to and fro. So utterly erratic are their movements that their flight provides a continual source of surprise to the spectator, if not to themselves. The tiny aerial clowns will dart straight

ahead, then confound themselves in a series of somersaults that leave an effect of giddiness on the watcher. The quaint things seem to explode in a dozen directions at the same time, and yet retain a matter-of-fact and demure air throughout the performance. A surprising bird is the fantail.

This morning the peace of the scene is disturbed by more than the notes of the tui bird. There is something unusual afoot. Half-way up one of the mountain-sides a thin column of smoke rises dimly blue above the tree-tops, and from that direction the crisp, staccato bang of axe-blows breaks sharply through the still, leaf-scented air.

At occasional intervals one note drops out for a while from the chorus of blows; then a prolonged series of thundering crashes drowns the sound of the remaining axes, and, booming dully, rolls down the echoing valley.

They are bushmen at work up there; it needs not the mind of an expert to discover that fact. They have cut a track to their camp somewhere, but there are no signs of it here. If you would visit these disturbers of the countryside peace you must make up your mind to an arduous and rather irritating climb. But the undergrowth is not unduly dense here, and the feat is more easy than usual to accomplish.

Nevertheless, the ascent to this camp seems beset with every conceivable difficulty with which Nature can confront the rash mortal who penetrates her

most jealously guarded fastnesses. Slippery, twining surface-roots form an uneasy ladder at the best of times, and the many festoons of the hanging, and quite infernal "bush lawyer," with their prickly, tearing spikes, lie in wait for the unwary. It is astonishing how many unpleasant things there are, hidden in the soft green, that buffet, and cling, and entangle. If the spurs still remain to your heels, the sooner they are off and in your pocket the better it will be.

The angle of the ascent, too, is sharp enough to demand the use of hands as well as of feet. The only ray of comfort that a more than usually critical situation produces lies in the reflection that the surrounding wilderness of tree-trunks will not permit a failing footstep to occasion a lengthy fall. The progress is marked by a twisting and scraping through the intertwined boughs, by many rude clutches at the graceful, delicate leaves of the patrician nikau palm, and a ruthless scrambling through the fine tracery of the fern undergrowth.

At last the ringing notes of the axe sound more loudly and clearly, and in the end the climb is done, and the rough clearing opens out in which lies the camp itself. Pitched on a small, comparatively level plateau, three or four small square tents surround a larger one designed for meals and general use. A few yards from the larger tent an iron cooking pot, suspended from a pole stuck at an angle in the earth, steams above a blazing log fire, on which a scantily

attired youth of the "rouse-about" or general utility order piles fresh fuel from time to time.

The domestic arrangements here are simplicity itself. In the shade near by stands a tub filled with salted water, in which repose mysterious, shapeless portions of mutton awaiting their turn for the pot. Farther on a couple of heavily built, cross-bred dogs of the kind useful in the hunt for wild pig doze in the sunniest part of the clearing, while a dapper little terrier, the possessor of an anticipatory mind, regards the smoking pot, pricking his ears sharply.

Another scramble through the bush to where rings the sound of the nearest axe, and there is the bushman himself in the full swing of his labour. Clad in blue "dungaree" trousers and coarse grey shirt, with clasp-knife in his belt, he plies his long-handled, keen-bladed axe with lithe, supple movements, his feet steadily planted on the sloping ground. He is of spare rather than of heavy build, but every muscle in his frame is of iron blended with elasticity. His arms and bearded face are tanned to dark mahogany, and his eye glows with the steady, keen light that only those who live their lives with nature possess.

As the axe is raised to his shoulder his right hand slides upwards on the shaft, and, as the blade descends, the hand falls again to the butt, thus lending a swing to the blow that tells on the hard, resisting wood. Upwards and downwards strike the blows alternately, and each, a wonder of accuracy, forces the broad white splinters from between the two parallel cuts in

the trunk far and wide into the air. As the blade rises and falls with measured crash, deeper and broader grows the cleft in the massive tree, until the apex of the neatly cut triangle is well beyond the centre of the trunk.

Leaning on his axe, the bushman, casting a meditative glance around, takes stock of the adjacent forest giants and, forsaking the one on which he has been operating, he takes his position by the side of another growing higher up the mountain-side. This also, and several more in a rising line with the first victim, have to submit to the deep wounds of the axe, until the point is reached whence the "drive" is to commence.

Again the blade swings to the clean, sure cuts, and this time without mercy. The massive base is hewn three-quarters through, and still the blows rain on the widening gap. Pausing for a moment, the striker casts a hurried glance upwards to where the labyrinth of ponderous branches spreads far and wide, then he narrowly inspects the shape and direction of the deep, yawning gash, and the position of the tree next in order below. A few more swinging, powerful strokes evoke a dull, jarring groan or two from the interior of the massive column, while the upper branches sway gently and quiveringly to and fro, as if in anticipation of their fate.

The man, uttering a high-pitched warning shout, plies his axe with redoubled vigour, and the thin white slabs fly faster than ever as the keen edge bites

in remorse. Now a chorus of sharp, complaining creaks mingle with the deeper-pitched groans of the straining timber. Then a loud rustling high overhead, and the bushman leaps back as he sees the upper branches of the doomed tree moving slowly and majestically through the yielding foliage of its firm-standing neighbours. A rapid series of cracks, loud as pistol-shots, ring out, together with a tearing, splintering sound as the giant, overcome, gains impetus in his descent.

And what a picture rises up with startling abruptness ! Where before stood a dense, impenetrable wall of branches is a flood of sun-rays, and, as if a veil had been torn asunder, the eye follows down a long, clear-cut avenue of light. There, far below, flows the river, and, on a level with the eyes, rise the green, rounded forest domes on the opposite slope, the whole picture framed by the even banks of vegetation that bound the newly cut avenue.

Down the avenue itself the massive, stricken trees lie in an unbroken line ; the bushman's craft has not failed him, and each one above, dashing its weight downwards, has completed the destruction of his lower-placed neighbour, already weakened for the blow. There they will lie until the parching sun shall have turned their green tints to brown, when the flames, licking round their smoking lengths, will leave them a strewn mass of charred timber and logs that in turn will be hidden by the rich, all-covering grass.



NEARING THE JOURNEY'S END

When the great clouds of dull grey mount in sombre volumes to the blue sky, then you may know that the final rites of the sacrifice of the forest are being accomplished. The tremendous spectacle may last for many days as the curtain of flame spreads over hundreds of acres, extorting thunderous cracklings and deafening hisses from the tortured masses of dry timber, while at night the fiery glow lights up the sky almost from one horizon to the other.

To the disinterested a gargantuan bonfire of the kind is to be remembered merely for the sight it affords. To the owner of the blazing acres the time is an anxious one. A favourable breeze will blow the huge tongues of flame up the gullies and over the crests of the hills, leaving only an insignificant residue of charred timber that, even then, will smoulder for weeks.

It is only, of course, when the wind has set in from the desired quarter that the torch is applied to the prostrate forest. But the wind is fickle, and its direction may change. In this case the full force of the fire may well enough fail in many portions of the area to be destroyed, with heavily cumbered ground and financial loss to the sheep-farmer as a result.

On such occasions desperate efforts are made. There is a firing of the enormous mounds of dead leaves in fresh directions, and struggles through the undergrowth that may be perilous in the extreme in the face of the flames. It has happened that men have gone in on such reckless missions as these, and have

never come out alive. Others, menaced in similar fashion, have only escaped by a hair's-breadth. One instance in particular I must describe in full—if only as a warning to others not to take unnecessary and foolhardy risks.

On the face of the steep hill-side roared and seethed the vast furnace of flame. For acre and acre surged the fire, leaping ever onwards, fanned by the wind that blew upwards from the valley, and seeming to rejoice ever more fiercely as the hungry flames pressed forward, devouring as they went. Above the curling, twisting shafts of fire danced a red rain of sparks, tossed to and fro in wild eddies, while a dense, rolling mass of smoke climbed, sullen and threatening, slowly to the crest of the hill. In betwixt the deeper roar of the burning trunks the sharper crackling of the sun-dried branches and leaves burst forth in a continuous crisp rattle, like to the report of the Maxim amid the sound of heavy guns.

The bush had been fired. For months the New Zealand summer's sun had poured its pitiless rays upon the felled, stricken forest giants, parching the sap from them as they lay, and now their brittle remains were to be swept from the face of the soil they had so long and so jealously guarded. Up the hill-side rolled steadily the tide of the writhing flames, the molten, glowing area spreading with an ever-increasing hiss and roar until the fires of the nether-world itself might well have been tossed upwards upon the tortured earth.

On the trees that fringed the adjacent green forest the nearest leaves quivered and shrivelled in sympathy with their burning brethren. Higher yet upon the hill, whither the leaping, fiery tongues were hastening, was the vast tangle of trunks, branches, scrub, and leaves that lay, untouched as yet, awaiting its approaching doom with mournful rustlings that the passage of the breeze drew from its sere mass as it whispered the fateful message.

Amid the labyrinth of withered forest struggled and fought the lonesome figure of a man. In clothes torn to shreds, hanging rag-like about his panting form, and with flesh bruised and bleeding, he strove against the timber and branches that repelled him with such cruelly wounding points. Beneath, on all sides, and often above him, for the heaps were a dozen feet in height, and more, they interposed their detaining arms as though determined that he should share their fate. With straining limbs he would draw himself upwards over the tangled mounds, as often as not dropping heavily to a lower layer of dead vegetation, amid a loud, harsh crackle of dried leaves.

With a passion of eagerness, he would strive to pierce with his eyes the brown walls that hemmed him remorselessly in. But ever nearer to him drew the flames, and in still denser columns came the threatening, dark volumes of smoke. Again and again he renewed his wild efforts, now clutching with spasmodic grip a friendly branch, now sliding and slipping

on the smooth, sloping timber beneath. With frenzied darts, as those of a trapped creature, he flung his bruised body forward, sinking down after each struggle in mute exhaustion as the strength of his limbs flagged more and more.

Greyer and more opaque grew the smoke-cloud, and, as it wound its suffocating coils more closely around him, he gasped weakly in short, choking coughs. Then, above him, borne high in the air, flew the first flight of sparks, grim heralds of that which followed behind. With a last effort he dragged himself toilfully to a high point in the brushwood, and cast a despairing glance about him.

All around and above where he crouched rolled the woolly, impenetrable smoke, through which the flying sparks gleamed in ever-increasing numbers. With smarting, glowing eyes he strove to pierce through the grey-white curtain to what lay beyond. As he looked, a dull, red glow shone tentatively, faintly, far back where the vapour rose most thickly. And as it strengthened and deepened, a withering puff of hot dry air was wafted strongly upon him, while the dull roar that had sounded in his ears grew more intense, all-pervading.

Crouching lower yet, he bent his ear to the sound, and, as he listened, the hiss of the burning wood seethed about him like the suck of a vast retreating wave on the grinding shingle. The fierce menace of the sound stirred the man to a wild, unreasoning frenzy. He fought on once more in a whirl of panic

and madness. Kicking and blindly striking at the branches that lay before him, he cursed their dead forms, and tore savagely at the wood as though battling with a living enemy. And all the while the heat grew more intense.

Then suddenly, as, beaten and spent, he reeled weakly, came a break in the rolling clouds of smoke ; the waving masses were flung aside as by an invisible hand, and he saw. A few score yards distant leaped and whirled the foremost flames of the vast furnace that glowed and scintillated blindingly red. Above the rising, forked tongues the air quivered and shook, as if even the atmosphere itself were in mortal pain. To the right and left, as far removed from him, it seemed, as heaven is from hell, loomed soft and green the cool, verdure-clad hill-sides.

And there, nestling afar off, but so clearly chiselled against its background that it seemed that he had but to stretch forth a hand to touch its familiar walls, nestled the station-house itself. For a moment as he gazed upon it he forgot all else—felt himself lifted far from the horror that was closing fast upon him. Even the movements of two horses grazing near it, their only anxiety the quest of the sweetest tufts of grass, interested him to the point of fascination.

Then the heavy white veil swept noiselessly, swiftly over all, and once more the choking reek pressed heavily upon him. He could do no more. With a groan he slid, unresisting and limp, down deep

into the tangle of the brushwood. It appeared to him that he sank countless yards until the heavier limbs brought him to rest ; but little he cared, for hope was gone from within him.

With eyes closed, numbed both in body and soul, he lay still. But even here there was to be no peace ; a pointed stake-end was pressing cruelly upon his shoulder. Turning to avoid the pain, he glanced upwards, and as he did so his heart seemed to stop its beating. For between the trellis-work of timber and branches came glimpses of the clear blue sky. With feverish scramblings he drew himself upwards once more, his grip nerved anew by the sight ; and as he rose clear from the topmost layer of the boughs the changed wind fanned him with a cool, refreshing caress. The flames before him still leaped hungrily, viciously, but the ground they gained was slowly and hardly won. Forgetful of his torn hands, his bruised limbs, the man flung himself onward, fighting as though fresh to the struggle.

Then, as he mounted a high-heaped mass, his foot, in his too great haste, slipped. Crashing through the twigs, he sank rapidly downwards. As he rolled, a sense of infinite freedom came over him. He felt no more the brushing of the twigs, the sharp blows of the larger branches. Gazing dazedly about him, he found himself grasping a short tuft of yielding grass, while before him stretched a broad vista of living green. Then he understood. The next moment he was staggering across the open country, the roar of the

flames growing fainter, the hissing dying to a sigh as he went.

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And now for a later picture of more normal station life.

The grass has been sown. Men have walked over the few level stretches, strewing the ground with the seed. They have clambered up and down between the gullies and the peaks, leaping goat-like from point to point, casting handfuls of the tiny brown pellets into the air that they may be caught up by the innumerable rough terraces and projections on the steep slopes.

The result is evident in the later spring. Lakes and rivers of green are spreading little by little to cover the face of the burned land. The blades are rising in all directions to caress the great charred tree-trunks that lie in black unsightliness upon the earth. They are the pioneers of the hosts that will soon paint the whole countryside with their verdure. As it is, the sheep are already here, forcing their way between the trunks, passing in single file from point to point, but nibbling all the while with the steady complacency of the ovine race.

Other sheep are upon the lands that had never known the bush, feeding on the dense carpet of fern that covers the soil. These are feeding reluctantly. They would infinitely prefer the soft shoots of the young grass. They take to the task of "fern-

crushing " in much the same spirit that a boy accepts a meal of dry bread. But the diet serves a double purpose: it does them no harm, and clears the surface of the ground. So the plain fare is rigidly enforced, and any attempt to forsake it for any other is actively discouraged by both shepherds and dogs.

The progress of the pioneer is in full swing. From out of the confusion of green forest and the later litter of blackened timber is emerging a sheep-farm. The contours of the hills are bare now, and sharply cut. Only here and there is left a great patch of virgin bush, a timber reserve that looms up in heavy majesty from out of its bare surroundings.

There is a considerable difference between the great agricultural youngster and a matured English farm—I explain this obvious fact for the benefit of the unsophisticated townsman. Although the land is clothing itself, the ruggedness and débris of its surface are sufficient to appal the heart of the new-comer. Later, there will be tracks that little by little will tame the roads over the most awkward and rebellious spots. But this reward of labour is reserved for the years to come. At present the place is as angular as a maiden in her early teens.

Nevertheless there is a business already on hand that demonstrates clearly that the station is passing out of the very first stage of its youth. In a valley are piles of wooden posts and of more lightly split battens,



N.Z. Gov. Tourist Dept. Photo.]

A RIVER ROAD

while great coils of wire lie in the neighbourhood. The first fence is in the course of erection, and the strenuous process is worth watching. Indeed, in the opinion of many it is preferable to watch it than to take an active part in the operation.

Half a dozen horses, pack-saddles on back, are standing by the side of the heaps of timber. The posts are being lifted up to rest on their supports on either side of the animals, until the load has grown to be as much as they can support with safety. It is no genial task for the horses, this. They have experienced its arduous delights before ; hence the ears laid well back, and the sullen protest of their attitude.

Before them rises the mountain-side, its face rough and broken. There is nothing for it : where sheep can climb, the fence must climb as well. Just now it is a little difficult to see how it can scale the alarming barrier ; but a little experience will convince you that a fence-line of the kind is capable of the most unexpected feats of mountaineering.

The horses, each tightly strapped about with its surcingle that presses the timber down into its place, have started to the accompaniment of stockwhip cracking. In a few moments they have reached the foot of the rising ground, and the ascent has begun. There are tasks into which the horse enters with his whole soul. This is not one of them. Yet, once fairly upon the ascent, he has no choice but to strive with every ounce of his strength. For there is no halting

then. The way is either upwards—or downwards in a hurry !

So up they go with leaps and jerks, hoofs beating and scrambling, and the urging music of the stock-whips sounding continually at their backs. It is a heart-breaking, hideous climb. No wonder that the temper of the poor, hardened old equine wretches in soured, and that they are handier with their hoofs than those animals whose backs have never bent beneath a pack-saddle ! But needs must where the fence drives, and it is not the horses alone that suffer.

Behind them come the men, toiling upwards with panting springs as they clamber in haste to right and to left as the horses show an inclination to forsake the route that has been mapped out for them. The animals must be headed back then at all costs, and the result is that the men, although their backs are unburdened, are forced to cover a far greater extent of land than the horses.

Now comes a climax. Climaxes, as a matter of fact, are as common as carrots when posts are being packed, and this is one of many ! A horse has given in. He has sought refuge on a projecting spur of land, and from that point of vantage he is surveying the struggles of the rest. Shouts and the increased din of stockwhips are of no avail. Regardless of the din, he remains in mute and obstinate protest.

Not until a man has climbed to the very spur itself does the animal move. Then, stung into fresh life,

he plunges wildly upwards ; his hoofs strike upon a slanting, slippery tree-trunk, and the next second he has commenced a terrific downward career. With an ever-increasing momentum he rolls, first hoofs upwards, and then the load of timber still firmly held in place by the remorseless straps.

In his descent the animal has almost carried the man with him to destruction. The rotating mass passes within a foot or two of the driver, and a worse tragedy is only averted by the merest chance. And now, spinning like a great top, the horse has reached the bottom of the hill. Those who are not familiar with the peculiarities of his kind would never expect to see him rise again. But in a second or two the animal has dragged himself to his legs, trembling and sobbing, but unharmed in body. He is a pack-horse ; and it is said to be difficult to kill a pack-horse, even with an axe.

Moreover, he has to climb that hill, for the fence must be laid. And he does, since the mad roll has driven the temper out of him for the time being. What is one horse that he should stand in the way of the making of a station ! So the posts and battens are laid in their allotted places, and horses and men descend the hill in quest of a further load, and struggle upwards again time after time until the last of the piles has mounted the hill, and the men and animals are as weary as it is possible for healthy beings to be.

Afterwards will come the turn of the wires. When

their lines stretch over the folds of the country there will be defined paddocks at last. By that time the land will have been born again ; for the benefit of mankind this time, and only very indirectly for that of the sheep.

CHAPTER V

SOME INCIDENTS AND CHARACTERS

THE cadet of the Antipodes has much in common with that rapidly expiring tribe of the "crammer's youth" at home. He has been sent on the land to learn its way—which he may or may not do, according to his fancy. Unkind folk are wont to assert that his estimate of self-importance continues inflated until the end of his probationary period. But this is a little sweeping, since allowance must be made for separate individualities.

In any case the vicissitudes of the New Zealand cadet are considerably more marked than those which accompany the career of the home student for Government service and the like. He is there to be "licked into shape," and to learn the value of land, sheep, cattle, and crops. He must acquire the art of "casting" a sheep-dog, of controlling a refractory steer, and of bucketting his pony up and down gradients of forty-five degrees in the dashing fashion of Maoriland.

The welfare of the cadet must, of course, depend largely upon the sheep-farmer to whom he has been entrusted for tuition. But, whether his school

prove smooth or rough, it is seldom that his existence is not a happy one. Affected by neither good nor bad times, he may watch the progress of events with the easy philosophy of one who has not yet entered the financial arena of combat with the land.

His first arrival, it must be admitted, is wont to afford as much interest to others as to himself. It is the moment of his strongest individuality, as expressed both in person and luggage. He is a little prone to violent extremes. For a week or two he may flaunt in the back-blocks of the bush the sartorial trophies of Bond Street. Or, on the other hand, prepared for more than the worst, he may discover the need of tuning himself up to the level of unexpectedly æsthetic surroundings.

Needless to say that the raw cadet is accepted by the tried hands as something in the nature of a freak. But his lot should not be a hard one ; for the temperament of the man from the bush has no use for torment. He must expect to be the victim of a few practical jokes, of a mild and innocuous order, until he finds security and peace in the more or less accurate merging of his personality with those of the rest.

So far as the shepherds and stock-hands are concerned, it is seldom that they question the common sense of a cadet on his first arrival. It is taken for granted that he possesses none, and their dealings with him are based strictly upon this theory. But there are exceptions even to this rule concerning cadets. There are others, moreover, over whom

Providence watches with a zeal that might almost seem unfair to the rest. In such cases all the ordinary rules, tenets, and theories fall, shattered, to the ground.

There was the cadet, for instance, who came to the Manatu station in the near neighbourhood of the township. It was evident to all upon the place that an even more unsophisticated specimen of the new chum genus than they had thought possible had planted himself in their midst. Indeed, so transparent was his ingenuousness that even those who normally possessed no humour for the cruder jests contrived to fashion some for the occasion.

Thus, within a few days of his landing, misled by specious assurances, he was lured to the hunt ball in morning tweeds that distinguished their wearer in conspicuous fashion from the ruck of men in conventional dress, and the few others in pink. It had been surmised that he would depart in haste, to return in more appropriate garments. But, lacking the sense even to be confused, he remained as he was, and was made much of by the ladies, who had gleaned some of the facts of the situation. So great was the cadet's success and so enviable his lot that the prime mover in the conspiracy, his own nose out of joint, left the scene in dudgeon.

As a set-off to this the cadet was taken to the club, and taught poker. It is a fact that he was uncertain of the difference in value between four aces and a pair of eights. Yet, by some means utterly inexplicable

to himself and to the rest, he found the recreation a profitable one, and rose from the table a winner.

Returning to his tutelary station, he was inveigled into a horse deal by Ned Flannagan, whose morality in things equine was as broad as his brogue. From him he purchased an animal owning a strain of the thoroughbred and an abnormally bad splint. But the deal did not end there. Realising that he had not taken full advantage of the bargain, Ned bought back the horse, and, having clipped, hogged, and docked it out of all amateur recognition, sold it once again to the cadet at double the original price.

Then ensued that which disturbed the district in general and Ned Flannagan in particular. The splint cured itself—temporarily, at all events—in some unheard-of fashion; the horse won a selling plate in a canter, and the cadet discovered that he had made an ideal transaction.

The climax, however, arrived when some of the cadet's alleged well-wishers sold him a sheep-dog, a creature suspected of the unspeakable offence of sheep-worrying. The developments that ensued then were sufficiently dramatic to shake the confidence of the most hardened shepherd. For the cadet's new dog, having triumphantly vindicated his character by discovering and all but slaying the real criminal, a homeless, prowling marauder, gained further laurels by securing the first prize in the next "rounding-up" competition.

After that this astonishing son of good fortune was



AMONG THE HILLS

left in peace, while his name gradually grew into a byword throughout the district. At Manatu the hands still speak of him with bated breath, not as a cadet, but as *the* cadet !

But, after all, it is worth while being laughed at to be a cadet. A status of acknowledged irresponsibility is not without its own peculiar delights, and the recollections of a cadet age, though frequently ridiculous, are seldom unpleasant. I should know ; for it has been my fate to afford as flagrant a case as any of the utter incapacity of the raw cadet.

The thing happened in this way. I had only recently arrived in New Zealand, and had made my way without mishap to the station that was destined to receive me. Since I could ride a little and shoot a little, it is possible that my utter ignorance in the way of anything concerning practical housekeeping passed comparatively unnoticed. Indeed, for the first week there occurred no opportunity of putting these particular faculties to the test.

But after that occurred the inevitable. The day came when the three experienced members of the establishment departed on a sheep-drive that was to last for two or three days. The cadet was left to his own resources. There was no reason for complaint in that. The idea of being left as temporary lord of these thousands of acres of mountain and valley was a delightful one. The whole station offered itself as an ideal playground, since no actual duties had yet been assigned me.

I had got out my gun ; had shot a cormorant on the banks of the river and a cock-pheasant on the slope of a hill, when the first passing moment of doubt arose. What about food ? Until then the subject had occurred neither to myself nor to the others. Later on it became clear to me that the intricacies of bachelor housekeeping in the bush are largely matters of the moment.

Returning to the station, it must be admitted that the condition of the larder gave material for thought. I had already discovered that, in the absence of a professional cook, the interest of those concerned in the production of meals was of a half-hearted order. There was some evidence of this now. In a tub of salt-water floated various portions of sheep ; a tin near by was filled with ship's biscuit, and a chest of tea kept it company. There were salt, pepper, baking-powder, and one or two similar preparations of a mysterious and incomprehensible nature. A further search resulted in an important discovery, the fragments of cold mutton " left over " from the last meal. Beyond this there was plainly nothing.

For all practical purposes the pheasant I had shot represented a pretty toy. As a meal the bird was a negligible quantity. Alas, that a youth spent in England should frequently be so unconcerned with the mysteries of the kitchen ! I must confess to my shame that among the pots and pans I was a mere babe, a hapless creature who but dimly understood why beef turned brown and lobster red.

Even then, anticipating some such possibility as this, I had taken the precaution of watching the grilling of a chop in a large and shining kitchen. Alas again for my experimental choice of the menu ! Nothing here, not even the sections in the salt-water tub, bore the least resemblance to a chop. Had one existed, there still remained the lack of any implement that might be mistaken for a grill. At this rate it seemed difficult to get into one's stride.

Fortunately the remains of the cold mutton were at hand to stave off an immediate crisis. Fortified by this for lunch, I strolled out again, endeavoured to glean something of the points of the sheep grazing on the hills, watched the cattle for a while, and incidentally shot another pheasant. Sunshine, sparkling air, and many clamberings are wont to produce hunger in a healthy person. Had I but realised it, they were extravagant luxuries just then.

It was only when I returned, filled with little beyond hunger, that I realised that the crisis had quite suddenly become acute. For many reasons I will not describe in detail my attempts to cope with the various pieces of salted mutton. Let it suffice to say that the point at which a meal should have crowned my endeavours never arrived. After a while I was faced by the plain truth. If my cooking was orthodox, then the meat was bad ; if the meat was good—well, it did not really matter in the least, since the result in either case was not to be masticated.

Never before had I realised what it is to be an un-

practical Crusoe, a species of ancient mariner on shore with mutton everywhere and not a chop to eat. Of course the whole affair was pre-eminently ridiculous. But I will maintain that there are many others who do not realise the full depths of their helplessness until they are put to the test. As for me, there were the ship's biscuits, real hard ship's biscuits that it was necessary to coax into fragments by means of an axe. But they served. Soothed by their adamant substance, and lulled by the faint nocturnal baaings of the sheep, I went to sleep in the solitudes as cheerfully as I could, considering the natural obsession involved by a sense of dire failure as—a colonist.

In the morning almost the first objects that met my eyes were the brace of pheasants. Pretty, admirable, and pathetic things. There their merits ended. I might as well have tried to create an omelette as to cook a pheasant. Nevertheless, the comparison was productive of an idea. In the neighbourhood of the homestead roamed hens of a semi-independent breed. Where eggs are, chickens must be ; it seemed to me that the axiom reversed must apply with equal force. So it proved. After a lengthy search I found two eggs beneath a bush, and the eggs consented to be boiled. It was only when my hopes had been raised to their highest pitch that it became gruesomely evident that the eggs had been long beneath the bush, perhaps even on top of it when it was a mere seed !

There was ship's biscuit again for breakfast, and it

looked very much as though the same fare would have to serve for lunch. Indeed, this would undoubtedly have occurred had not a rider come into sight, cantering slowly along the cutting in the mountain that rose sheer from the farther bank of the river. Out of despair was conceived an inspiration. I cooed as a sailor, stranded on a raft, might hail a passing ship. And then—it is best to be quite frank even in a confession of deceit!—I shouted to the stranger a cordial invitation to come to the homestead for lunch.

He arrived some twenty minutes later ; it had been necessary for him to ride to the ford and thence back to the homestead. He was the owner of a small station in the neighbourhood, it appeared, with whom I eventually became on terms of close friendship. At the time my chief interest in him lay in the fact that he cooked pheasants admirably. He was, moreover, of a comforting disposition. For when he had heard the story of the ruse and its reason, he assured me that he had little doubt as to my ultimate success as a colonist ! But in the end this was never put to the test, since other matters intervened.

The humours of the bush are not confined to the personalities of untried cadets. The element of sport enters deeply into the life of a station, and the rivalry between neighbouring properties is wont to culminate in tests of horseflesh and the like that are frequently productive of a purely farcical element due to the intrigues of one side or, probably, of both. If you

can borrow a second-rate racer, a genuine "daisy-clipper," from some more populous neighbourhood, the possibilities are enormous. You can turn the animal out, cover him with mud and dust, and bring him to the improvised starting-post in the guise of an ordinary station hack. Of course, your strategy will be found out long before the start; but it is always worth the attempt! If productive of nothing else, it may be counted on to evoke an enlivening flow of chaff, or of "barracking," as the local term runs.

There are times when the intermingling of sport with more prosaic matters attains to a degree that is a little startling to the new-comer. I remember this to my cost; for it was but a few days after my first arrival in the bush that I underwent an impressive experience of the kind. Breakfast was proceeding in apparent peace. Set by the side of an open window, the little wooden table groaned beneath the weight of a tremendous array of chops that were individually disappearing as rapidly as do mere rashers of bacon at home.

I was as busily occupied as any. Indeed, so absorbing were the chops that I failed to notice a quick movement on the part of one of my neighbours. It was not until an explosion within a foot or two of my ear sent some half-swallowed portions of breakfast on what is popularly known as "the wrong way" that I noticed that something unusual was occurring. The enthusiast responsible for the

uproar had caught sight of a hawk floating quite close by against the blue of the morning heaven. His loaded gun was within reach ; so without an instant's delay he had taken a pot-shot from the breakfast table. He brought down the hawk, moreover. It was all in the day's work.

Since this chapter seems largely to be concerned with food, it may as well be concluded in a consistent fashion. After all, food is of at least as great an importance in the bush as elsewhere. By this time I had grown more or less familiar with its practical intricacies, since you must imagine the lapse of a year between the last incident and the following.

It happened that the owner of a small neighbouring station, the identical Samaritan who had served up a brace of pheasants to a starving cadet, had run short of potatoes. In answer to an appealing message I had mounted my horse, and, bearing a weighty sack of the roots in front of the saddle, had set off for his homestead.

Needless to say that in true bush country it is necessary to take the roads as you find them. But this that lay between the two stations had never attained to the dignity of a road at all. It was a tenuous track that wormed its way as best it could along the broken valley, crossing in its course several creeks as well as the river.

The passage of these creeks was never without a certain degree of excitement, although the event was of more than daily occurrence. The swollen

winter waters had carved out for themselves sheer sides that rose a dozen feet and more above the normal level of the stream. It was a simple matter for the cat-like up-country horses to place all four feet together and to slide down one of these banks, clambering up the opposite side by means of an amazingly agile rush.

The feat, as I have said, was simplicity itself to these cunning bush-bred animals. Not once in a thousand times did one of them make a mistake. As fate would have it, that morning represented the thousandth time to my mount. Sliding downwards, he lurched in mid-career, and came to the bottom in a heap. No harm ensued to potatoes and man, beyond a slight ducking. Raw "spuds" are proverbially hard, and if a rider be not equally tough, New Zealand is no place for him.

The four-footed cause of the disaster was in less fortunate case. His knees, struck against a sharp-edged rock, were badly cut. There was nothing for it but to drive him up the farther bank, hitch him to a convenient minuka tree, shoulder the weighty sack, and proceed on shank's mare for the few hundred yards which fortunately alone remained of the journey.

As I drew in sight of my friend's verandah it became evident that he was not alone. By his side was seated a man in dark clothes of a kind that we in our scorn were wont to term "townified," and in breeches of an unworkmanlike cut. He was unbrowned by the sun,



A WATERFALL

and looked soft. There was no reason why he should not have been as good a man as any other for all that. But we of the bush did not think so.

The stranger's power of eloquence was apparently great. He was talking ceaselessly until the station-owner, catching sight of my approaching figure, interrupted the flow of words by a couple of interjected remarks that appeared to refer to me. As I gained the verandah I missed the usual cordial gleam in my friend's eye.

"Want a meal?" he demanded curtly.

When I had nodded acceptance he turned to the stranger.

"Here's a man you might insure," he suggested.

At another time I should have given him small thanks for this betrayal into the hands of this itinerant and persistent agent, as I now perceived him to be. It happened just then, however, that I was anxious to insure my person against the risk of those accidents which are not unknown in station life. In consequence I entered into the scheme with an enthusiasm which seemed considerably to exceed that displayed by the agent himself. He asked the necessary questions in a half-hearted manner, and the notes he took were desultory.

In the end the man inquired—with a bored air which I both admired and resented—whether I could give him an address in the township to which he could forward the papers. I gave him that of the club. It seemed to me that his manner savoured of

mental resignation as he surveyed my stained and dripping dungaree trousers, muddied spurs, frayed shirt, and worn felt hat. Then he rose to go.

“But you have not noted the address,” I reminded him.

It was all right, he assured me. He was not likely to forget it. I should find the papers waiting for me—on my next visit to the place. His smile as he spoke was supercilious almost to the point of offensiveness. Then he walked to where his horse was tethered, mounted clumsily, and rode away.

He was certainly not at home in this world that was new to him. Yet he was deserving of a certain admiration; for he was resolutely braving these wilds that were not without their terrors to his town-bred spirit. I remarked to the station-owner on the man’s refreshing lack of “push.”

“He didn’t seem to mind whether he insured me or not,” I added, filled with this new wonder.

Since the agent’s departure my friend’s expression had completely changed. Now he burst into a roar of laughter.

“‘Push!’” he exclaimed. “The man was persistent enough to insure a deaf and dumb bush-pig. He was a perfect terror—an epidemic in himself! But when I saw you coming I told him that you must be a “swagger” hard-up for a meal. He knows nothing of the district and its little ways. So when I turned him on to you he made certain that he was wasting his time. Nothing else would have sent him

away. What he considered your infernal impudence was too much for him ! Splendid inspiration of mine, was it not ? ”

I agreed, and we remained in a condition of intense amusement for some while. This fortunate state does not demand an intricate incentive in the bush. My friend was perfectly right. No insurance papers awaited me at the club on the occasion of my next visit. Upon this we referred to the joke again, and laughed as heartily as ever. And then, a short week later, my horse came down with me, and I broke a collar-bone ! I have never been quite so angry with an insurance agent before or since !

This story must not be misunderstood. It is not intended as an advertisement for the advantages of insurance. It holds no moral whatever. It is a bald narrative of some facts in which fate played an unkind part.

This insurance agent, at all events, was honest. The methods of a later visitor who braved the bush on a commercial errand of another kind left more to be desired. He was selling a new species of sheep-dip, a much-belauded article, at a surprisingly cheap price. A whole train of pack-horses accompanied him, laden with the remedy. In a remarkably short time their backs were free of their loads, and, travelling fast, the man departed, promising to return with further supplies.

When the mixture was put to the test it was found to be supremely harmless. It consisted, in fact, of

nothing beyond ground and coloured chalky matter. The discovery enraged the entire district to an almost incredible degree. Did you ever know a man who dealt in livestock who did not value his reputation for shrewdness above all other earthly things ? And here were fifty such reputations exploded at one fell swoop ! Had the victimiser been sufficiently incautious to enter the neighbourhood again I honestly believe that the threats with which it teemed would have been carried out, and that the cattle-dogs, sheep-dogs, and stock-whips would have been grimly busy. Did he come ? Do you think it likely ?

CHAPTER VI

THE MORNING'S WORK

BANG ! Bang ! Bang ! Was ever sleep murdered by such an outrageous uproar ! As for the unfortunate sleeper, his head jerks up from the pillow, and he rubs his eyes. Impossible to lie and doze with that din reverberating through the room. There is not even breathing-space for reflection and comfortable grumblings. Moreover, the chaos of sound is increasing. The door of the room swings partially open. Pushed through the aperture, a battered old tin tray appears : above it is poised a clenched fist that threatens to extract yet more of those ghastly complaints from the suffering tray. The catastrophe is averted by a vigorous protest, and by the flinging of a heavy boot that strikes with a crash upon the panels of the door.

The infernal tray has done its work well. The station is awake ; it has been shot neck and crop from the realms of slumber to the business of the day. First of all to the river that plashes its waters in a musical invitation for the dip. So out of the house you go with a rush into the warm sunlight, through a blaze of golden wattle, past the song of rustling pam-

pas grass, until the small garden is left behind and the green paddock stretches to the front. Across this at a run, and then comes the sound of the river rushing in its deep bed below.

The descent involves a minor feat of mountaineering. You and I must drop from point to point, and must trust a little to luck as well as to a firm foothold, clinging to every friendly tree-trunk and flax-bush as we go. Once on the little sandy beach a couple of turns and twists send the scanty garments flying, and then we are in the water, breasting against the cool stream.

The spot is ideal for the purpose. No one is by but a couple of hawks, who float in circles far overhead in the deepening blue, and the innumerable small fantails that dart amongst the bushes on the bank, flying their ridiculous little zigzag course, and bursting out into occasional tiny chirps. Presently when the rubbing-down process is in full swing on the beach they come forward in such bold and intimate rushes that it would seem an easy matter to catch one of them by the mere stretching out of a hand.

When the dressing is done and the upward clamber achieved, the dew-laden fronds of the ferns brushing softly against the cheek, there is already a broad interval between the risen sun and the highest spur of land, and the shadow on the opposite range is sinking lower and lower, giving place to the brilliant sunshine.

In every direction rise high grass hills, precipitous

in parts, dotted with charred trunks of trees, and a patch or two of "reserve" bush. Here and there a tree-fern or a clump of cabbage trees raise their feathery heads, wondering, doubtless, what has become of the many thousands of companions that surrounded and protected them a few years ago. That collection of tiny white spots on a steep green spur is a flock of sheep, although from here it might be mistaken for a mass of white ants.

The clock within the homestead says that it is seven o'clock. Town clocks would give it the lie, for, according to them, the hour is barely six. But we make our own truths and our own time here, as, indeed, do the rest of the stations in the neighbourhood. We pride ourselves, in fact, on being a self-contained community in all things. If we choose to indulge in the luxury of daylight-saving, whom else does it concern? The only thing that matters just now is that there is barely sufficient time to catch a horse before breakfast.

Two men have already sallied out, bridle in hand. It is necessary to hasten in order to overtake them. The horses are in the small paddock near the bungalow itself, and at the warning sound of the creaking gate they fling up their heads, and survey the approaching human beings in tense cogitation. At the end of a few moments they have made up their minds. Docility is not to form part of the programme this morning, it appears.

A dozen strong, each filled to the brim with devil-

ment, they thunder to and fro over the grass. It is necessary to employ strategy in return. The men spread out, each covering as much ground as he can, and advance cautiously to the attack. Twice the animals are headed back in their rushes; a third onslaught is only staved off by a furious effort that leaves a fatal gap in the line. The horses, bunched together, and all but cornered, perceive it just in time. With joyous leaps and flounderings they scamper through, and, manes and tails streaming, have won their way to the opposite end of the paddock.

The men face about; but this time the manoeuvre is frustrated ere it has had a chance of developing, and the animals, skirting the fence line, sweep back at racing speed. The third advance is conducted with a tremendous care. With the horses in their present mood, it is necessary to combine the caution of the butterfly-catcher with the wariness and agility of the elephant-hunter. And all this for the securing of a few nags who are inclined to play rather than to work!

This time all goes well—up to a certain point. The creatures' wheelings have been met and checked by frantic dodgings. For all their wiles, they are being driven in upon themselves, their free area lessening steadily as the corner of the paddock is approached. Another few yards and their investment will be certain. The moment has grown tense. Then ensues a great plunging and thudding of hoofs. The most vicious beast of all has lashed out right and left, and,



EMBARKING SHEEP

having thus effectually stirred the drooping spirits of the rest, he is leading them out in a last wild sally.

“Look out there! Head 'em off! Head 'em off!! Head 'em *off!!!*”

A volley of cries rends the early morning air as the outside man turns to run. The animals are skirting the fence again. It is a race between him and them with a strategic point in the line of wire as the goal. Ah, the cross-grained brutes have it again! No! At the critical moment they have hesitated; then they dig their hoofs into the soil as the man with the waving arms dashes before them to the fence-line with a couple of yards to spare. They roll back in a surging, defeated wave to the angle of the paddock. Steady now! Just flap the length of the rein round their fetlocks if they *will* turn their tails to you instead of their heads! That's better! All over! A minute later three of the horses, securely bridled, are led away in a chastened mood.

From the direction of the bungalow the battered tray has been giving out its impatient music for some while. Within, the breakfast chops are waiting. An extraordinary heap of chops, this; a steaming mountain of generous brown shapes the mere sight of which would cause active terror in a dyspeptic, a vegetarian, or a blend of both. I would like to see a model wrought in plaster of Paris of one of these breakfast dishes of the bush, with every section of meat and bone and fat accurately and beautifully portrayed. I would have it exhibited in some

populous and butcher-ridden centre as a meal of some other age, and I would listen with some pride to the envious sighs of the spectators : “ They were giants in those days ! ”

Of course, you must not be too *exigeant* in the bush. You must not, for instance, count upon this liberality in meat to extend to all other things. In fact, it must be frankly confessed that the station where we are just now, lacking womenkind, is a little in the rough. You will find no table-cloth here, and milk and butter are only for those who have time to “ run in ” cows and to tame them. Bread, too, is a nuisance to make when the hard and deathless ship’s biscuit is at hand to take its place. Later, when the metaphorical cows come home in earnest, we will have all these things, and a cook, and a rouse-about too, as well as a really crack hunter, a tennis lawn, and a ram with a blindingly brilliant pedigree ! Perhaps we shall even own a racer that shall be the envy of the entire populace.

For the present we practise polo, using hardened old turnips for the ball, on rather unkempt shepherd-ing ponies whose withers never have—and never could have—passed beneath the standard. If we hunt with the draghounds on the distant plains we go fairly slow, for our cattle, though steady, are no fliers. We have not yet arrived at the state of trimmings ; we are in a condition of plain and plentiful chops.

But do not imagine that you will glean anything

of this from the conversation at breakfast. The remarks here are spasmodic and desultory. The conscientious lowering of the mountain of chops leaves little leisure for verbal explosions. Such words as triumph over adverse circumstances deal purely with "shop." We are off to muster cattle, it appears. The wild mob in the Ridge Paddock has been there long enough: it is time they were moved into Number Four. It all sounds very simple—over the chops and milkless tea. But the Ridge Paddock is the steepest and roughest on the station. There will be hard riding this morning.

The move is from the lightened breakfast table now towards the saddles and spurs. A number of the cattle-dogs, unchained, go bounding to and fro in their newly found freedom. The horses are ready. There is a grasping of manes, a plunge or two on the part of the steeds, and the cavalcade is off, and on its way.

The morning air is still fresh and cool. The first half-mile, along a fairly level valley, is productive of at least half a dozen pleasurable circumstances that the senses of none but a dullard can fail to take in. The springy heave of the horse, the musical creak of the leather, the whiffs of tobacco smoke that pleasantly profane the scented air, the strong sense of physical comfort, and the knowledge of a day well begun—this is only a portion of the fare on which the exhilaration of the party thrives.

As a matter of fact the time for this full apprecia-

tion is not too long. The talk and laughter die away as the horses begin to mount the face of an almost precipitous hill. Rise in your saddle now, and get a strong grip of the mane if you would ease your panting mount as he strains gamely upwards from point to point in a series of jerks and bounds !

The climb is of a nature to appal a horse—and many a rider too—from the plains. Already the homestead far beneath looks a mere toy ; but the way leads higher, and higher yet. The last twenty yards are the worst of all. Frankly, this wall-like barrier that crowns all the rest is just a little depressing to look up to. There is always a suspicion of doubt about these last twenty yards ! The horses know it well. They wait for a while, panting heavily, and pull their energies together. Then the plucky animals take the obstacle at top speed, the only remedy for the case. There are a scramble, a few slips, a frenzied struggling while the horse's head rises to top the rider's, a rattle of hard, loose soil, and then the thing is done.

The entire company has come to rest on a little plateau that juts boldly over the valley. Just to the front is the Ridge Paddock gate. From it extends the wire fencing to right and left, dipping and rising at amazing angles, clinging in places to sheer hill-sides, until the posts and wires are lost in the scrub or behind a shoulder of land. Once through the gate, the party halts for a while. Girths must be tightened now, for any moment may bring the cattle in sight.

Onwards again down the hill on the farther side—a long descent that, though encumbered by tree-trunks and scrub, is comparatively easy in grade. Sinking downwards almost to the lowest point, we come to where two narrow valleys join. Along the bottom of either runs a creek, and where they come together extends a space of some dozen acres of flat land. The creeks are harmless, pretty, trickling things now, fed by a few miniature waterfalls that leap down the sides of the hills. They are potential dangers, for all that. The first earnest downpour of rain will convert them into yellow, rushing rivers, easily capable of whirling away horse and man in their frothy depths.

The sides of the valleys rise up, majestic and threatening, broken into hundreds of feet of sheer precipice in parts, and showing many a landslip like a gaping wound. Half-way up the slope of one of the valleys stands out a collection of little red and white dots. The cattle! By a stroke of unexpected good luck almost the entire herd is bunched together at that one spot.

Two of the riders prick onward, and are soon lost to sight amid the windings and bushes of the valley. If you have no objection we will stay behind. This is a strategic point just here, and were no one on the alert you may make perfectly certain that the cattle will attempt to turn the corner sharp and to break back up the other valley that runs almost parallel to their own. It is necessary to leave the mouth of the one valley clear, and to guard the other with

might and main. They are a wicked set of beasts, these in the Ridge Paddock.

In the meanwhile we are quite at liberty to pass the time as profitably—which is to say, as comfortably—as we may. You yourself may dismount and take your seat on a grassy little knoll, never releasing the rein even while you cut the plug of tobacco and fill your pipe. The horse may wander in as large a circle as the bridle will permit, champing with ceaseless industry at the green tufts, from time to time placing his hoofs in such disrespectful proximity to his owner's person as to merit a warning slap with the open hand. Your cattle-dog has already curled himself up, and is dreaming of a heaven full of bullocks whose profession it is to be chased without interruption for all eternity. Each of you, in fact, has found peace in his own way, whether it be feeding, smoking, or sleeping.

The spot is a paradise for the senses. It is as well to make the most of the languor while it remains, Just below, the shining creek trickles down its bed. Above, on both sides are patches of bush with a dense undergrowth of fern and evergreen shrub. Here the lianas, the "bush-lawyers," and "supple-jacks" twine themselves round the tall stems of the trees, and fall downwards, hanging like exaggerated threads of cotton.

From the midst of the bush comes the peculiar warble of the tui, that beautifully modulated string of notes that resembles the beginning of a bar of music. You can just catch a glimpse of one in a great white

pine, his shiny coating of black relieved by the tiny dash of white at his throat. Near by, sitting in slumberous contrast to the life and song of the first, is a sedate pigeon, his stout form half-hidden by the foliage, who remains motionless and stolidly indifferent to all about him. Those old and tiny friends, the fantails, are here as well, their minute frames hovering ceaselessly round, filled to the brim with sociability.

The peace of the atmosphere is soporific. One wonders lazily why, in order to fly a couple of yards, it should be necessary for the fantails to turn so many aerial somersaults, and why the melody of the tuis should invariably cease at the same note. It would be interesting to hear the end of that refrain. Perhaps they have forgotten that which more gifted ancestors knew ; perhaps . . .

A quick pull at the bridle shatters these theories, and brings their author back with a jerk to the everyday world. The horse is standing at attention, with arched neck and pricked ears. At the same time a sound like that of a distant pistol-shot breaks upon the still air, and the echoes catch it up and waft it from side to side. The noise galvanises the dog into life. He stands like a bronze model, every muscle tense.

The cattle are coming this way. It is time to unloose the stock-whip from the saddle and to mount. For the present nothing is to be seen. It is indispensable to remain behind the promontory of high land,

and to keep out of sight of the cattle approaching along the other valley. For a glimpse of a rider to their front would send them doubling back upon their tracks, to the confusion of the programme.

The wait is relished least of all by the horse who, knowing that he has a gallop in store, strains at his bridle, and sidles impatiently to and fro. The dog, though equally anxious, brings a greater degree of philosophy to bear on the situation. His ears are pricked to catch the distant noises ; but his eyes are fixed upon his master. He will not budge until the signal is given.

Nearer and nearer sounds the crack of the stock-whips, mingled now with the barking of dogs and an occasional stentorian shout. Then from behind the group of cabbage trees that mark the extremity of the dividing promontory of land emerges the vanguard of the herd. Half a dozen head of cattle swing to a halt, glance at the forbidden, guarded path, and lumber off again in the right direction.

So far, so good ; but here is a second contingent, far less amenable to reason than the first. Round the corner they come with a rush, and make straight for the narrow valley. No need to touch the horse with the spur. With a start and a spring he gallops straight to head their onslaught. His ally, the dog, dashes in his company to the front, singling out one of the most sullen of his enemies as the object of his attack. Crack ! crack ! goes the heavy stock-whip. The



Bathgate, Photo.]

TREE FERNS

cattle have had enough. With a very bad grace they wheel round to their appointed path.

The rest of the herd follow in their track, crashing heavily through the branches of the scrub, slithering over the stones of the creek-bed. All but one, a vicious old cow who, irritated by the dogs at her heels, launches herself in full career down the valley of escape. Now is the time for a tried stock-horse on his mettle! The beast is utterly maddened, a fierce thing of brandishing horns and flying hoofs. Impatient of dodging and twisting, she makes a rush at the dog, who, not expecting this, has only just time to save his skin. Then, in an ecstasy of fury, she charges straight at horse and rider. The mount whirls round like a blown leaf, and the cow has missed by more than a yard. And now, turn and twist as she may, the horse is always in front of her, and the stock-whip cracking incessantly about her ears. The time for patience is past. The stinging lash falls once, twice, upon the cow's heaving quarters. With a whisk of her tail she abandons the attack, and gallops off in foiled fury to join the mob of her companions.

That effected, we may join the remaining two cattle-punchers, who have just come into sight. The one is laughing; the other looks downcast. A sprinkling of earth on his back and a tear in his flannel explain the reason. His young horse, new to the work, it appears, had lost his footing on a steep bank, and had rolled to the bottom, to the dis-

comfiture of his rider and the ill-concealed amusement of his companion.

We ride along in company a little to the rear of the cattle, keeping a sharp look-out for any that might take it into their heads to come bolting back. But the unruly mob have a more subtle surprise in store. Led by one of the most intractable of their number, they swerve suddenly to the left, and devote themselves to one of the most surprising feats of mountaineering ever attempted of such beasts. Indeed, the hill-side up which they scramble is fitted for few creatures less agile than an antelope. Some come rolling and crashing backwards again; but the majority win their way by sheer force of upward stumbling to a narrow ridge.

The first instinct of the riders is to spur upwards in their wake. But any move of the sort is rapidly checked. Displaced by the threshing feet of the cattle, an avalanche of rocks and stones comes bounding down the hill from point to point. The effect is rather comical: it is exactly as though the bombardment had been knowingly engineered by the creatures. Nevertheless, it is necessary to turn tail in haste, and to take refuge behind some massive, sheltering tree-trunks.

The triumph of the cattle is short-lived. Worming his way up above them, a rider sends the party helter-skelter to the bottom again. The escapade is the last of the drive. Its conclusion sees the humbled herd plodding steadily along in the charge of watchful

men and keen-eyed dogs, uphill, down-dale, and along the beds of creek-beds. The gate of their destined paddock is in sight. Gallop ahead, one of you ! Ride like—many things !—and swing the gate open, and get out of the way before they come ! At last ! They are through ; and the morning's work is done.

CHAPTER VII

SHEPHERDS AND SHEEP-DOGS

THERE are various creatures and things in the Antipodes the characteristics of which run "contrariwise" to those of the corresponding objects "on top." New Zealand lacks a black swan, it is true ; but she has a wingless bird, and she has taught quite a number of her oysters to grow on trees. Of course the trees fringe the sea, and the actual nature and habits of the oyster here are the same as elsewhere ; but the fact remains that they grow on trees.

The act is a very kind and thoughtful one on the part of the bivalve. It provides an eternal fund of little verbal quips and cranks as well as of expressions of incredulous surprise on the part of the ingenuous new-comer to the country.

It is a far cry from the oyster to the shepherd. The oyster, in fact, has been dragged in by its beard merely in order to prove that the actions of dumb creatures and men are not always consistent with their various reputations.

The New Zealand shepherd, for one, is wont to present a misleading mental picture of the breed of men who take rank as such in the older countries. He

is anything but the slow-limbed, rather vacant-eyed rustic of popular imagination. Nor is his field of operations the smooth-carpeted, smiling meadowland where graze a few dozens of tame and tractable sheep.

In order to justify his existence it is necessary for the New Zealand shepherd to be a man of many parts, of resource, of unshakable nerve, and of unswerving determination. This much the entire brotherhood must have in common. In other respects the mere rank of shepherd will indicate nothing at all. He may be the son of an agricultural labourer, or he may bear a name that rings familiarly in the ears of all.

As for the bush, it has little concern with human origins. It has given to the shepherd his tracts of wild, forest-covered mountains, piled grandly range after range, and the shadowy gorges with their creeks, and the rolling seas of feathery manuka. It is a country so fertile in revelations and surprises that no man can say with justice, "I know it." For where a week before grew tree, turf, and fern, there to-day the mountain-side may stand out naked and stark, while the vegetation, ruthlessly torn away by a landslip, lies rotting in the gully far below.

It is a place of many artificial and natural vicissitudes, where the smoke of hundreds of acres of burning giant trees, victims to the axe, rolls sullenly to the horizon, and the cleared land unwillingly exposes its long-hidden secrets. A land, too, where the sun rises and sets with a marvellous splendour, and where

the earthquake shakes the timbers of the humble, slab-sided hut and the walls of the most elaborate bungalow homestead with impartial regularity.

The bush contains a curious force. There are some whom she casts out, despised, back to the seething, reeking cities. But those whom she has really enfolded she holds fast and for ever. The deserters, few and far between, can seldom struggle for long against the magnet of her appeal, and in the end turn bushwards again, rejoicing.

They are the gainers, I think. In the hush and solitude of the lonely lands men struggle not against each other, but labour together as comrades, fighting the common battle back to back. For the law of the bush is that each shall take good care of himself, but, if flung down by adverse fortune, that he shall lie untrodden, and rise unhindered, if he can. Few, indeed, are the hands that will not stretch out, offering timely help freely and willingly.

Hard and strenuous though the life may be, it brings rewards that outweigh the privations. Perfect health, strength, and an easy mind are the compensations granted to the shepherd. If you would learn of what he is capable watch him, seated firm and unshaken in the saddle as his wiry mount dives down the precipitous mountain-side, springing cat-wise from point to point, and landing on all four feet together with a jolt and a jar that would send any but one perfect in muscle and training flying over his horse's ears to the depths below.

Patience, too, is a quality that the shepherd must possess in no common degree. Sheep of all breeds, whether close-woolled merinos or long-fleeced Lincolns, are wont to develop a power of obstinacy which, added to their natural stupidity, rivals that of the mule itself. An incautious attempt to force them on their way is likely enough to result in the scattering of the entire mob, and in the consequent loss of hours of labour.

Watch the shepherd, too, as, bridle in hand, he stands by his horse, perched on a lofty crest, mustering the sheep on the opposite mountain slope. High above him float the hawks; around him rise the towering peaks; and far away, where the valleys will permit it, flashes the silvery blue line of the ocean.

He has eyes for none of this. His dogs are hanging upon his signals; the distant sheep are collecting into companies. A moment of suspense as the white dots waver and the dogs work hard, then a glow of victory as the swaying patches dissolve themselves into thin-ruled lines moving towards their goal.

Then, again, it is worth while to see him on the main road, watchful and alert as ever, superintending the procession of his fleecy charges. He has risen by starlight. The rolling clouds of dust mark the passage of the flock. Thousands of small horny feet patter on the hard, sun-dried road, while the atmosphere is laden with the warm oppressive odour of the fleeces.

In the van paces the leading dog, while his "forcing" colleague, a pace or two behind the rearmost batch, stimulates the laggards to energy. A couple more dumb helpers pad along, one on either flank, their eyes fixed alternately on the moving stream and on their master. As to the controller of these thousands of unreasoning, obstinate animals, he must be ever alert, however hot may be the sun, and however alluring the prospect of a doze in the saddle. Cross-roads, patches of light bush, or open gates, will offer opportunities of which the sheep will not fail to take advantage, and, unless an incipient mutiny be nipped in the bud, the whole mob will gleefully break bounds.

As with the men so it is with the dogs—the working dogs. If the New Zealand agriculturist has learned to labour at high pressure, his dog is no whit behind his master in the art of "hustling." Moreover, they have learned economy in energy.

If you chance to find yourself at a station homestead, watch the long row of kennels. If the "run" be broad in acres there will be a street of the squat little buildings, each with its tenant stretched out before the doorway. If you doubt the canine possession of an earnest spirit their faces will convince you of its existence. From mere gravity their expressions range to the point of dourness itself. The majority are frankly careworn. They neither tug at their chains nor strain in a futile attempt to gambol with their fellows. They lie in statuesque thought,



ON THE PLAINS

a glint of watchfulness mingling strangely with the meditation in their eyes.

This attitude of theirs is not to be wondered at. From your point of vantage, the station buildings—half a dozen social pins' heads lost in the vast nature about them—gaze upon the landscape. You will see narrow gullies, broader, deeper gorges, the swelling of the uplands, then, high up above all, will rise the crests of the mountains and loftier hills. Upon the broad sweep to the right lies the thick curtain of bush. Rising and falling with the curves of the earth, it fits each angle as closely as dark green fleshings, until it waves its topmost leaves upon the highest peaks.

To the left lies the cleared land. In the hollows and upon the slopes the newer green of the grass is fighting to maintain and increase the hold it has won. It is meagre as yet in those parts where the blackened stumps of the burned bush giants rise in gaunt confusion.

Where the broad white of the "slips" stands out upon the steeper faces of the hills it has vanished entirely. It is as though the earth had yawned, flinging from it ten thousand square feet of topsoil and grass. But even here the young shoots struggle forward once more, essaying a mountaineer's feat upon the precipitous slope.

Upon this verdure, dotting it as the flints gleam from an English down, are tiny white specks. Their movements are imperceptible; they stand now in scattered units, now in close rows. Few and far

between would seem these small white dots. Yet in each dip, behind each cleared crest, down in the hidden gully that intervenes, are more. There are thousands in all, browsing, roaming, helpless as—sheep.

They are the charges of the dogs, the prime causes of those careworn expressions. A sheep is meek in the abstract alone. In the flesh he is the toughest of cross-grained mutton. His joy is either to find or effect a break in the long lines of wire fencing that leap and fall with the twistings of the earth. However poor the grass upon the forbidden side, he will scramble through, taking the merit of wrong-doing for his reward alone. The sheep-dog has for his dominion an empire of seething rebellion—an obstinate community which if by chance possessed of a single good intention would nullify it by the crass stupidity of its fulfilment.

The sheep-dog is the first to recognise this. When the call to duty sounds he becomes a different creature to the brooding animal that lolled at the end of his chain. He will bound with shining eyes and loud barkings along the hill-side, forcing the sheep, willy-nilly, before him. He will fight his way through scrub and flax bushes, bending his ear the while to the sound of a shrill whistle that comes at intervals from the far distance.

Then may come a pause. The sheep, well in hand, stand huddled together, but the whistle has been shrilling in rapid notes of warning. The custodian

listens intently. Then he thrusts his hairy body through the bending branches until he emerges into an open space. He sits down, and remains motionless as a small statue with pricked ears. It is his signal—the admission of his doubt.

In the distance, near where the clouds press upon the opposite peak, sits a horseman, small as a toy soldier. The silent message has been read. Another whistle, an indicating wave of a tiny arm, and all hesitation is at an end. The dog has bounded back into the scrub, emitting a hurricane of barks to compensate for the suspension of his tongue. Once more the sheep move forward, snapping the twigs as they go. But they have yet to be reckoned with. Ere long revolt against their destiny and its canine agent will have entered their woolly breasts. They will break back in sullen, obstinate rushes. It is then that the light of battle glows in their guardian's eye. Turning, twisting, charging at times, he will wage war upon the flock, until the low rumble of the hoofs gives way to the steady patter of the onward march once more.

When all is over, and the sheep safely mustered, none is gladder than the dog. Asceticism is the enforced forerunner of a day's sheep work. In order to stimulate his eagerness, he will have gone supperless and breakfastless. His task accomplished, he may feed.

They are an honest, hard-working community, these sheep-dogs. Innocent of breed, their value is

purely personal. It rests upon their own and their forbears' record of steady labour. They represent the aristocracy of toil. Among them a dog of prize strain would be judged by nothing beyond sagacity and the strength of his bark.

As in every grade of society, there are malingerers among the number. There is the old hand, told off to beginners, who lives upon his reputation alone. Familiar with every trick of shirking, he understands the value of a good impression. After the simulation of a hurried exit with the other dogs, he hides in a patch of bush. Panting forcedly, he returns with the rest—to flatter the innocent new chum with his tail. He lives upon the fat of the land. Still, crafty though he be, he works less harm than the too enthusiastic youngster who, dashing recklessly here and there, tears his own hide and forces the sheep, through mere terror, in unwished-for directions.

But, young or old, there is one crime he may never commit. The fault is expiable only by death. He may maul his brother, he may turn upon his master—all this is forgiven. But to kill a sheep is murder. The law upon this is inexorable. However lengthy the record of his services, however great a favourite, found guilty of this, he dies !

CHAPTER VIII

WORK AND PLAY WITH THE FLEECE

SPRING is well advanced ; the young grass on the hills wells up green and vigorous, coaxed by the warm rays of the sun. The creeks that brawled downwards so fiercely, swollen by the winter rains, now send their waters with a gentle ripple once more over their narrowed beds ; while the lambs, already independent of their mothers, have changed their treble bleat into a deeper note.

In the woolshed, although the rising sun has barely topped the hills, all is bustle and preparation for the labours of the day. From the pens that line one side of the building comes a continuous rattle of small, hard feet, as the sheep within them move uneasily. Sitting or standing in groups about the remaining part of the shed are the Maori shearers, busily engaged with the sharpening of their shears, the right wrists of the majority, as a matter of precaution against a possible strain, strapped tightly with leather or cloth.

Chatting gaily at the door are two dusky girls, and a boy of similar complexion, known, in the language of the sheds, as “fleece-ohs” and “sheep-oh” respectively. The duty of the former is to gather

from the floor the fleeces of the sheep as they are shorn ; the office of the latter is to keep the pens well filled with animals for the convenience of the shearers. The remainder of the party within the building consists of whites, each having his particular duty for the day allotted him.

The final turn of the strap has been taken, the last shear sharpened, then comes the awaited signal to commence work—a stentorian cry of “All aboard.” Each shearer, springing to his feet, moves quickly to the door of the pen provided him, opens it, and emerges, dragging by a hind leg an unwilling, struggling sheep. The wool-classer takes his stand before the sorting table, the “ presser ” climbs inside the high, square, wooden structure that rises in the centre of the floor, in readiness to receive the fleeces.

For a time there is no sound but that of a rapid metallic snicking of the shears. One might imagine oneself in a parody of a barber’s shop. Then one of the Maoris rises from his knees ; a sheep, whiter and, apparently, smaller than he was a few minutes before, is hurriedly bustled out through one of the exit-holes ; a fleece goes flying through the air towards the man awaiting it in the press. Then another, and yet another ; and now shearing is in full swing. The “ sheep-oh ” rushes here and there, energetically driving the yet unshorn sheep into the emptying pens from the open spaces, using his soft hat upon their backs as an instrument of persuasion.

The presser, boxed within his wooden prison, rises gradually higher and higher as the pile of fleeces grows beneath his feet. Then, the bale within being filled, he leaps to the ground to assist in the working of the massive levers that press the wool yet more closely. A couple of men, with rapid stitches of their large needles, make fast the top to the gunny, the side of the press opens, and the first bale falls out with a heavy thud upon the floor. The next moment the presser is once more within his box, catching the flung fleeces as rapidly as before.

The majority of the shearers are working carefully and steadily, but two of their number, each aspiring to "ringer's" fame, have now commenced to race each other in the quickness of their shearing. With such ardour do they set about the task that the perspiration is speedily pouring down their broad, dark faces. Equally matched, for a time they shear sheep for sheep, neither obtaining the remotest advantage over the other. As they jealously eye each other's handiwork the pace increases still more—with the inevitable result.

There is a sudden jump on the part of the unfortunate sheep, a call for tar, and the animal's skin exhibits upon it a wide gash. "Knock off dat for te bad shear!" cries the inexorable wool-classer, adapting his tongue to the pigeon-English in general use, the interpretation of the phrase being that no payment will be rendered for the shearing of an injured sheep. The culprit, mutely acknowledging the

justice of the punishment, looks downcast for a moment, but is soon smiling again as he continues his work in a more rational fashion.

The mass of sheep in the wool-shed is now rapidly thinning ; the door is flung open, and a fresh collection of white heads, set with doubting, inquisitive eyes, makes its appearance before it. Urged on, much against their will, by shouts and pushes from behind, a sufficient number is successfully driven within, and the "sheep-oh" sets to work to fill the nearly emptied pens. Again for a time the silence is only broken by the sound of the shears, the scraping of the sheeps' feet as, resisting, they are drawn forth, and by an occasional call for the "fleece-oh," to remove a waiting fleece.

Presently the barking of dogs, the stamp of horses' hoofs, and a chorus of "baas" from without announce the arrival of a fresh "mob," newly mustered from the paddocks. Through the open door a glimpse is caught of a living stream of woolly backs pouring itself, apparently without end, through the yard gates. Then a couple of shepherds, free from the care of their charges, enter to lend a hand where it may most be needed.

Still the business of the hour continues, the Maoris working with an energy heartfelt enough to find occasional vent in an uncontrollable shout, until the wool-classer, after consulting his watch, gives out the command, "Smoke-oh." In an instant the shears of all but two, who are conscientiously applying the



FLAX BUSHES



A BUSH DWELLING



finishing touches to a pair of sheep, clatter loudly upon the ground. Cigarettes are rapidly produced, and as hastily lit, and in a moment the whole party has formed a loud-talking, loud-laughing group. Notes are compared, and each shearers boasts, not aggressively, but with the delight of a child of nature, of his own deeds, until the warning shout, "All aboard," once more sends them helter-skelter to their places.

Thus the hours fly by; an interval for lunch is followed by a couple more shorter spells, until at seven o'clock in the evening the work for the day is done. By this time, the outward appearance of all, whether shearers, fleece-oh, presser, or wool-classer, has undergone the transformation inseparable from the task. The oily grease that has oozed from the hundreds of fleeces is over all, accumulated thickly upon hands and faces, staining the garments to a dark, shining tint, gathering too the plentifully flying dust liberally and lovingly to its surface.

The appearance, indeed, of the party is as disreputable as can, in the wildest flights of imagination, be imagined, but little they care for that as they pass out from the shed into the cool, evening air, for upon the shearers, at all events, there hangs not a care as weighty as a skein of the wool they have shorn. With the glee of schoolboys they run, shouting and laughing, to where the river flows close by between its willow-lined banks, and soon are sporting in its water to their hearts' delight.

At a slower pace, to the same end, follow the shepherds, while, most slowly of all, towards the homestead, strolls the wool-classer. But then he has matter for thought which the others lack, the quality of the wool and its probable price in the far-away London market, considerations which, perhaps fortunately for them, trouble his subordinates little.

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The last sheep of the mob has been relieved of its fleece, and, in company with its comrades of the final batch, has wandered, freed from the restraint of the pens, back to his own particular grassy realms. In the wool-shed the levers lie idly against the sides of the press, and the pockets of wool, firmly sewn, stand heaped in one corner of the capacious erection in readiness for the pack-horses. But, though wanting the patter of the small, hard feet on the boards, the click of the shears and the shouts of the shearers, there is no lack of animation in the building.

To-night is the night of all nights—the night of the shearing dance—and the seven stalwart, big-limbed Maoris who have formed the shearing party are busied in preparing for the great event. Some are engaged in clearing the littered floor, others in smartening their persons, while the one to whom is allotted the duty of musician presses a few tentative and anticipatory notes on his concertina.

In the centre of the room two or three Wahines

ply the men lustily with the somewhat broad banter that the lenient Maori tongue permits. The round, good-natured faces of the shearers crease into large smiles as they score a point in return, and the girls themselves break into intermittent peals of laughter, for among no race is the art of repartee better appreciated than among the big-hearted natives of those volcanic islands of the Southern Seas.

At the appointed hour, or rather a little in advance of it, for unpunctuality is not fashionable at a Maori dance, the guests duly arrive ; a couple more Maoris, accompanied by a small bevy of Wahines, the hands of the station of which the shed forms part, four or five shepherds from the neighbourhood, and, last but not least, the sheep-farmer himself, with his entire household.

Wool-pockets, laid lengthwise on their bulging sides around the space reserved for dancing, form convenient if inartistic settees, and on these the company repose, as old Karauri, the boss of the shearers, welcomes his white and dusky guests in a speech that is dramatically eloquent. So fervid, indeed, are his words and gestures that the plain Anglo-Saxon response of the run-holder comes as almost lame in expression, although not so in cordial sentiment.

These necessary formalities over, the concertina strikes up a swinging waltz, and the gaiety of the evening commences. The men outnumbering the girls, the young Maori bucks good-naturedly allow

their guests to claim their dusky partners for the first dance unchallenged, and the couples glide round, causing the candles placed at intervals about the walls to flicker as they pass. The evening is warm ; the hot, sickly odour of the wool permeates every nook and cranny, and the boards of the flooring lie somewhat unevenly, but such minor inconveniences damp not the enthusiasm of the dancers one jot. The Maori girl is a born waltzer, her movements being as graceful as her tread is light, and the station hand, though lacking his partner's grace, swings along with an agility born of the enjoyment of the hour.

Old Karauri, who has assumed all the dignity fitting to the occasion, converses affably with the station-owner's wife in Maori and pidgin-English alternately, the tattoo on his lower lip and chin broadening in sympathy with his smile. His native courtesy has prompted the application of a moistened finger to his cigarette, thus extinguishing it. This exhibition of politeness on his part is, however, somewhat unnecessary, as the pipes and cigarettes of the remainder of the company are in full blast, and he requires little pressing to re-light.

Meanwhile the concertina rolls out the notes of the waltz in so enticing a manner that the younger Maoris, whose feet have been hungrily tapping the floor, can no longer resist the musical appeal, and, failing fairer or rather comelier partners, form ladies of half their number and join in gaily with the rest.

At length the first dance comes to an end, and the performers, who have scorned a second's rest during its continuance, betake themselves contentedly to their seats on the wool-pockets. The art of "sitting-out," not being understood or practised in these dances of the sheds, a short minute's grace is given before the concertina player strikes up the Highland fling. Several Scotchmen are among the station hands, but their steps are in no way more gaelic than those of their darker brethren, who reel the dance off with nimble feet, beaming eyes, and even more than the required amount of energy.

And so at the shortest intervals one dance succeeds another, and the bare walls resound to the tread of many feet, while the deserted pens at the farther end of the building loom shadowy and vacant. Looser grow the tongues and louder the laughter, while over all wails and throbs the concertina. But an end must come to all things, even to the endurance of the hardy revellers.

There is a pause in the dancing, and old Karauri rises with importance to his feet. Two of his companions, having dived into a shadowy corner, reappear dragging a large jar and a case of ginger-beer bottles to the centre of the room. "Te ginger-beer for te ladies and te beer for te men," announces Karauri, with an introductory wave in the direction of the liquids; at the same time one of the Wahines, stepping forward with a pair of tin mugs, stands ready to act as waitress.

The mugs, filled with ginger-beer, are ceremoniously handed to the white lady guests, and when these have partaken of the effervescing fluid from motives of politeness rather than desire, the vessels become common property, and, rapidly filled and yet more rapidly emptied, each follows the other gaily round the circle. Cigarettes, too, are handed round freely, the Wahines puffing them with the keenest enjoyment as they listen to the incessant fire of friendly raillery that passes between the shepherds and Maoris. Then once more the concertina player takes up his instrument, and dancing recommences with even greater zest than before. After a waltz or two, a galop is started that shakes the dust in clouds from the floor and rattles the blades of the shears that hang on the walls, till all sink down exhausted in their places.

But all is not over yet. There is a cry for a shearing haka from the shepherds, and the Maoris, who enjoy the luxury of being pressed as well as their lighter-coloured brethren, at length consent to render their native dance. The performers place themselves in line awaiting the signal to commence. Then with a deep-toned roar and a stamp of the feet the dance opens, and the spectacle fascinates the eyes of the audience. Each gesture, each step is gone through in the most perfect unison, and the anatomy of the Maoris seems as though set on springs. The opening, danced in wonderful pantomime, represents the hauling of the still unshorn sheep from their pens,

then follows the throwing of the imaginary animals, and every following action until the dismissal of the shorn sheep terminates the performance.

Nothing is omitted; even the cutting of an unfortunate animal's skin and the subsequent application of tar forms the groundwork of a marvellous display of dumb histrionic power. The whole proceeding is vividly pictured, and the most striking feature is that, although the steps and gestures are as numerous as they are fanciful, the performers accomplish them as one man.

The Maoris, as they fall out of line, receiving the shouts of applause from the spectators with pleased grins, snatch a final drink from the tin mugs, for the entertainment is now over and the guests rising to depart. A further exchange of speeches between Karauri and the run-holder is followed by the prolonged hand-clasps so dear to the Maori heart. Then out into the open where the cool night air brushes away the effects of the wool, beer, and smoke laden atmosphere.

Near by, in one of the railed-in yards, stands a confused bunch of horses of all shapes, sizes, and ages. The shepherds pick out their respective animals, the Maoris their weedy mounts, and a few seconds later the whole band has clattered away into the darkness, shouting farewells to their Maori hosts and to their friends of the station.

Away they gallop, their shouts and laughter ringing over the still, night-covered land, until diverging

tracks split the party into smaller fragments. By the time they have reached their homes, the lights in the hospitable wool-shed and its neighbouring homestead have long been extinguished, and the shearing is a thing of the past.



A SUMMER STREAM

CHAPTER IX

GETTING HOME! SUMMER AND WINTER

THE last song has been sung, and the final trick has been taken on the green-covered table, where the cards now lie in a heap. The lamps glow softly on the flowers, the pictures on the wall, the deep carpets, and the thousand and one objects that make a really pleasant room out of four wide walls. Through the open French windows comes the scent of verbena and orange-blossom, and the mingled odours of a hundred other flowers.

It is time to say good night.

The wide verandah is in part lit up from within, in part lost in deep shadow. Where the beams of light strike upon the supporting posts hang great clusters and festoons of roses, their blossoms pricked out in tender brilliance from the inky blackness of their background. There are other flowers beyond that, caught up in some chance shaft of illumination, seem to float in mid-air, stars of passion-flower and clematis, and the hazy wreaths of the jasmine.

Beyond the verandah and out into the unbroken darkness. The way is through an invisible garden that yet sends its messages across the night. Soft

branches stretch out their sprays of leaf and blossom, each giving up its own odour as it fans the passer-by. Now and again sounds the rustle of heavier leaves, and the cool, silky body of a weighty magnolia bud bumps against the shoulder of the intruder.

A blind man's holiday, this ! Here is the gate by the feel of it, and here is the wooden bar that slides back with a rattling of timber. Presently the feet are treading upon turf ; the scent of the blossoms has grown fainter, and the airs blow in free and unimpeded breaths. This is the paddock, sure enough. Somewhere quite near by are the slip-rails in which wait the horses. Here they are, found by the touch rather than by the eye, and by the same sense it becomes clear that they are as empty as charity !

The poles that guarded the entrance are on the ground. Thrown into their sockets with a censurably impatient haste, they have been shaken from their places by the restless steeds. As for the latter, they are somewhere in the paddock, somewhere in the midst of the dense velvet black of the night. What a situation ! Not a star in the sky ! The clouds must have rolled up in volumes, which means that there is rain to come.

From where a faint light shines somewhere at the back of the invisible tree comes a distant hail. " All right ? " There is a moment's hesitation out here in the paddock. But why should those within be made to share the discomfort of a mistake of others ? The onus of rectifying our own carelessness lies with us

alone. And so the call goes back: "All right! Good night!" It is not true. But the lie is pardonable.

I have never been in a collision on the high seas. The abrupt transition from the broad decks and halls, the electric light, and the music to the small open boat tossing alone in the night is surely one of the most dramatic in life. Our case just now is mainly farcical, but it has an element or two in common with one of those great tragedies of the waves. A rider without his horse on a night such as this is as helpless as any shipwrecked mariner. Five minutes ago we were in a brilliant place of light, where the dresses of the ladies rustled graciously to and fro, and where the perfume of the after-dinner coffee rose, giving out a delightful sense of an assured and eternal comfort. Now we are in the outer darkness: I should say we must have travelled a thousand miles since then!

And now for the horses. Thank heaven that the paddock is a miniature one that can boast no more than a couple of acres! Across the night comes a welcome sound—the rasping of torn grass as the blades are snapped off by the massive teeth. If ever you went with care, grope cautiously in the direction of the noise! Only a few paces, and the sound has ceased. Two heads have been raised, and two pairs of ears are pricking acutely forward. This you know as well as though your eyes had pierced the night and had seen it for themselves. A step or two more is

ventured in the agonising certainty of what is to come. There it is! A rumbling and thudding of hoofs that passes close to the left and dies away to the rear! Then, very faintly now, the cropping of grass sounds again.

There is nothing for it but to turn about and to follow the champing music. The result is the same as before. If there was ever an audible and invisible will-o'-the-wisp it is present here, materialised in the horses' hoofs. Futility is annoying at the best of times: at midnight the state becomes unbearable. How infinitely irritating, moreover, is the reflection that the homeward way is not to be won until those elusive thuddings have been brought into subjection directly beneath one's own person!

The black of the sky above is tinged by a faint, shadowy pool of light. As the pool spreads into a small, starry lake, the world near by seems to roll forward from out of space. The dark silhouettes of the trees swell out of a sudden against the horizon; the level stretch of the paddock leaps upward from the depths, and there in the corner are the dim forms of two horses. A few moments later the reins rest securely in the hand. Never was an object more comfortable to the touch than this leather! A grasp of the mane, a pleasant creak from the saddle—and the night may do its worst!

The sky, indeed, is already repenting its moment of generosity. As the horses pass through the paddock gate the twinkling lake above shrinks into

nothingness, blotted out by an advancing curtain of black. When the outlines of the trees have died away in sympathy, the faint point of light no longer gleams from their rear. The hospitable station is asleep. The ever-vigilant dogs alone suspect the presence of belated guests. As the horses' hoofs leave the turf to strike upon the bare soil of the track, there is a distant rattle of chains and a chorus of protesting barks—a crude God-speed, but a welcome one, since it heralds the start on the homeward way.

Our part is done with. All that is necessary now is to keep in sociable touch with the horses' mouths, and they will do the rest. Not once do they hesitate, although from time to time they come to an abrupt halt in the midst of their walk or canter. Then you may stretch out your hand with certainty and feel for the bars of a gate. And then, when you have latched it again with the dutiful care that is part of the sheep-farmer's daily creed, you may go thudding onwards once more along the invisible track.

There are times when, if your mood chanced to be in tune for such a feat of the imagination, you might imagine that you were careering along a level turnpike road set between the hedges of England. In which case the land will not permit the mental picture for long. To the front sounds the ripple of water, musical and clear, through the still air. The movements of the horse have grown cautious and tentative. He has gathered himself together for an effort, and the next moment one is sinking in a sheer downward

glide to the accompaniment of the grinding and rattle of loose earth and stones. With a lurch and a jerk the sensation of falling ends. The noises of the descent have ceased ; we have shot down the face of the river bank.

Nothing is audible now but the rush of the waters. The ripple has swollen of a sudden to a deep cascade of sound that overwhelms the ear with its fullness, and that brings with it a strange sensation of giddiness. As to the horse, his nerves are on the rack. If you would remain dryshod draw up your feet as he paws the water and plunges into the invisible stream with the staccato leaps of the anxious-minded.

The deep swirling of the passage has given way to a tumultuous splashing that covers the face and body of the rider with spray. Then the great frame of the steed halts to crouch for a spring. One knows full well what he is demanding on the part of his rider—a hand in the mane, and the body drawn high up in the stirrups from the saddle. Now he is springing upwards in a paroxysm of bounds, and in a moment he is pacing the level ground, while the song of the river dies away to the rear.

When the pace has settled down once more to a steady canter you may do one of various things. You may converse with the companion who is thudding along sometimes at your side, at others elsewhere, according as the way is broad or narrow ; you may yield to the drowsy influence of the night and fall into the guarded doze of the man in the

saddle ; or, again, it is just possible that you may become reflective, and may think of many matters.

You may wonder, for instance, why you are ploughing onwards through the lonely night when all other folk are in bed. There is another ford ahead and half a dozen more miles ere the journey will be done. It has been a fairly long ride this, in search of—what ? A meal, coffee, cards, a little music, a glimpse of tasteful rooms, and the sound of women's voices ! Was it worth the trouble ? Elsewhere, scarcely, perhaps ; but here in the wide airs of the bush there is room for neither cynicism nor doubt. These visits are vital things ; periodical rubbings and furbishings that keep bright the machinery of the mental horizon. Were the distance twenty miles——

The horse shies violently and plunges to the left as a sudden scurry and a rapid trampling sounds from the neighbourhood of his hoofs. It is evident that some sheep sleeping by the side of the track have aroused themselves only just in time. They are bolting away with a flurry that resembles to the ear the rising of a covey of pheasants. Steady now ! So much for philosophy in the saddle ! The business of the hour is to get home.

All rides have an end. One had almost forgotten that in the song of the beating hoofs that bade fair to go on for ever. Beneath its influence one had grown drowsy again when the noise of distant barkings rings out from the front. As the sound is approached it swells to a fierce chorus of threats

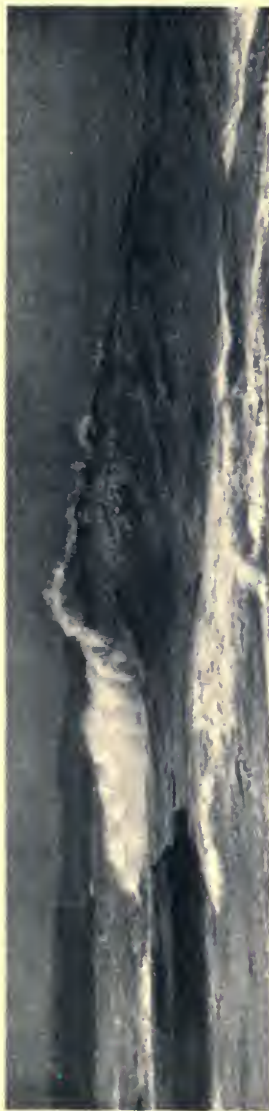
hurled across the gloom. Then of a sudden the angry notes turn to joyous canine bays of welcome. The homestead is at hand.

So much for summer journeying ! The vicissitudes brought about by the winter's rains are wider in their scope. At such times the reader may follow the rider with greater comfort from the cushions of his armchair. On a long journey it is best to be prepared for all things, as the following incident will show.

The gloom of evening was fast falling over the land, and the short winter's day was closing in as heavy a downpour of rain as had marked its earliest hours. Every nook and cranny, even those favoured spots that lay beneath the densest foliage, wallowed soddenly in moisture and mire, and still the blinding sheets of water came down as though the weather had lost to mind its brighter possibilities.

Along a narrow track, the bare mud of its surface even more saturated than the surrounding country, rode a man. In long leather gaiters stretching from the boot to the thigh, oilskin coat and cap, his appearance was a quaint compromise between that of a cavalier and a sailor, but his costume had the merit of providing such measure of comfort as was possible in the circumstances.

The horse beneath him laboured onward with many a " plop " as his feet drew upward with an effort from the clinging mud, and with many a downward lurch and nervous trembling as he plunged staggeringly through those portions of the road where, beneath



AFTER THE STORM



N.Z. Gov. Tourist Dept. Photo.

AN OLD-TIME MAORI WAR CANOE

the topmost earth, lurked a strata of treacherous bog. With flanks glistening and legs plastered to the barrel with a tightly fitting coat of mud, he appeared miserable enough ; and, fully alive to the discomforts of the hour, his head hung low ; but, doubtless inspired by the will of his rider, he pressed ever forward in sullen determination.

Deeper and deeper grew the gloom until to the man's eye all about him, even to the very ears of his horse, was hidden in the blackness of the night. All sound, save the splashing and slap of the hoofs, seemed lost in the steady patter of the rain, whose drops he felt upon him in as close a shower as ever. It seemed to him that he was in a world of his own ; a world that contained just himself with the animal that struggled so gamely beneath him, and that was bounded on all sides by a curtain of darkness and rain.

Then of a sudden the horse, with a quick jerk, and a stiffening of his frame, halted abruptly in nervous dread of something, perhaps imaginary, but at all events invisible to the rider. A sharp dig with the spurs sent him along once more, reluctant and sidling in fear, while the man, grasping more closely the sodden, slippery reins, held him more tightly in hand.

From time to time, peering to right and left, he strove anxiously to pierce the night, but it was as a black-painted wall about him. There was a louder splash, and the soft, musical ripple of a stream-

let rose from beneath, then fell behind, until the sound was lost in the distance. He had grown drowsy, as men after long hours in the saddle do, when the sense of something missing, of a break in a sequence of sound came upon him forcibly. It was as the sudden stoppage of a loud-ticking clock in a silent room.

In a moment he was alert once more, stiffly erect in the saddle, with ears straining to catch what his eyes could not see. The regular "plop, plop" of the hoofs was silenced, and in its place came merely a dull tramp, while the movements of his horse were easier, less laboured. He was about to check the animal when against his knee brushed the soft, caressing stroke of yielding twigs. Well he knew that touch. It was manuka scrub that was all around him, and, in consequence, it followed that he was off the track.

Reining in his horse with an angry pull, he gazed for a moment into the darkness, reproaching his mount bitterly for the abuse of the confidence reposed in him. To the right and to the left he assayed a cast, hoping against hope to light upon the narrow strip of track that would bear him home, but there was no break in the soft "swish" of the manuka. Irresolute, he halted once more, while the rain, grown doubly dismal, poured in steady streams from the brim of his oil-skin cap. The horse beneath him, shivering in the dampest discomfort, crouched dejected and mournful.

Twice the man drew his feet from the stirrups, and twice, reluctant to leave the saddle, he groped until he regained their hold. Then at length he slipped slowly to the ground. Passing his arm through the rein in his new rôle of guide, he walked aimlessly a few steps. Still, there was nothing but the wet manuka that reached now to the level of his shoulder.

Stumbling doggedly onwards, listening intently for the warning sound of a rushing creek, placing his feet as though the foremost might, at the next step, hover in mid-air over the brink of a precipice, he came at length to a spot where the manuka, dwindling in height, reached barely to his knee. A moment later his outstretched hand felt the contact of a slim tree-trunk. Around it the earth, though sodden, was firmer, and the place should be his camp, he decided.

Unfastening one end of the rein where it joined the bit, he tethered the horse by the lengthened line to the tree, then, groping for the girth, he loosed the buckle. The wet back of the animal shivered again uneasily as he lifted the saddle from it; then, moving a few paces from the tree, he made his simple preparations for a night in the rain. Placing the saddle padding upwards on the ground, he laid himself down, the one flap of the saddle serving as a pillow for his head, the other drawn above it to afford such protection from the moisture as it could. From out of the darkness, amid the splutter of the raindrops and the stronger splash of innumerable, tumbling,

miniature streams, he could hear the uneasy tramp of the tethered horse. Then he fell into a series of fitful dozes.

An hour before the dawn the lowering clouds rolled in sullen company to the eastward horizon, and when the sun rose it shone brilliantly from a fleckless sky. The drips from the leaves had grown ever less frequent, and at length entirely died away, while in the valleys the flaky seas of mist were vanishing slowly.

As the first beams of sunlight struck upon the sleeping man he awoke, and, rising stiffly from an uneasy rest, cast his eyes about him. There was his horse, standing miserably as he had stood through the night, the mud caked thickly in a hard crust upon his legs, while above it his coat showed matted and unkempt. Passing from the disconsolate figure of the animal, his half-awakened gaze grew more intent, then entirely incredulous. For the moment he had thought his surroundings familiar, more known to him, indeed, than any others, so like were they to a scene he had in mind.

He looked again. Could it be that the land held another peak, whose indented face caught light and shadow, whose serrated ridge was hugely broken in twin fashion with the one he knew so well? Swinging round upon his heel, he faced the opposite view, and, convinced at last, stared in dumb surprise; for, before him, at the foot of a gentle slope, not half a mile from where he stood, was his own hut, a rough, slab-boarded shanty, but his home for all that, while

he now saw that he himself stood within a semi-circular sweep of the track. Releasing the horse from the tree, he slowly walked down the slope, while the rays of the sun, increasing in power, beat down upon a man who was thinking many things.

CHAPTER X

SOME MATTERS OF BUSH AND PLAIN

THERE are some technical terms which, all the world over, appeal with peculiar force to the lay mind. In themselves they suffice to conjure up visions, not always accurate, of strange callings. "To boil the billy" is undoubtedly one of these. The phrase takes rank with such expressions as "splicing the mainbrace!" It is as well to have a stock of such things handy. They denote at all events a familiarity with the popular conceptions of conditions in far-away lands and seas.

It is lamentable that personal experience is apt to destroy the glamour of even such actions as that of "boiling the billy." When you boil the "billy" you make tea, *viola tout!* The actual process is simplicity itself. In the accepted fashion of recipes it would read as follows: place a pan filled with water over a fire; boil; fling in tea-leaves—then drink! There you have the mysteries of the "billy" in an unravelled nutshell.

The "billy" is a product of necessity. It is a simplified form of tea-making that has been brought about by the inconvenience of cumbering a saddle-

horse with superfluous implements such as tea-pots. Yet, although the rite in itself is such a simple matter, its circumstances in Maoriland are worthy of all the romance that attaches to it.

To drop from one's horse in a clearing of the forest amongst the mountain peaks, to collect the wood for the fire, and to watch the thin smoke drifting upwards against the blue of the sky—all this is very comforting and pleasant after a hard morning's work in the saddle. Amid other surroundings the ceremony would partake almost of the austere ; for the complements of the milkless beverage will in all probability be bread and cheese. As it is, there is something Arcadian about the "boiling of the billy."

Were China and the Indian Peninsula to sink beneath the waves there would be a revolution in New Zealand. One hears more of the Yellow Peril in the Antipodes than elsewhere. It may be that the folk there imbibe the sentiments of familiarity with the East with their tea. For the true New Zealander is firmly wedded to the leaf-water. In the bush homesteads, and in the greater number of town houses as well, it has ousted beer and wine from their places on the table by the side of the dishes. To the majority a meal without tea is as tame a procedure as a game of polo without a ball.

So far as meals are concerned, the custom does not only apply to the very large army of total abstainers. Even the "hard cases" who bless far-away Scotland for its mountain dew bow rigorously to the dominion

of tea at meal-times. The result is a little confusing to the new-comer. He may have been warned, for instance, concerning the habits of old So-and-so. According to reputation, the old stager deals in liquid morals that are of a past age rather than of the present. And yet there he is at lunch sipping tea with an air worthy of a district visitor !

If you would wish to see his cloven hoof, painted yellow, any period between meals is the time for the exhibition. Yet it is not for the present generation to be hard in their judgments on these relicts of cruder days. They, and their fathers before them, laid the foundations of the present, and laid them right well. Drink tea by all means, but remember that salvation is not restricted to the interior of a cup ! The incalculable advantages of the beverage have already been proved—so long as it does not turn sour upon the mind !

The pig is the sole animal of weight that inhabits the New Zealand bush. His presence there is more or less the result of accident. Indeed, had not the famous Captain Cook turned loose a couple of the domesticated species in the very early days of Maoriland, the forests would never be teeming with the creatures in their wild state as is the case now.

The civilisation of the fat porker in the sty is apparently nothing beyond a shallow veneer. So, at least, would the history of the New Zealand specimens tend to prove. It is less than a hundred-and fifty years ago since the famous navigator turned adrift



K. Northwood, Photo.]

ROADMAKERS' CAMP

the original couple. They were essentially conventional pigs: creatures with aldermanic figures, slumberous in temperament, and generous of bacon.

Their increase was phenomenal from the first; but the aspect of their present-day descendants is of a kind to break a butcher's heart. The various stages of transformation have ended by robbing the bush-pig of his rolls of fat and shortness of wind. The boar has grown lean in the flank, bony and broad in the shoulder, and from his jaw sprout formidable white tusks. He has, in fact, returned to his primitive state, and the lean, active tusker has now remarkably little in common with the obese barrel of flesh that wallows in the sty.

Although he is so well adapted for the attack, the wild boar is not by nature an aggressive creature. He is that, indeed, in no part of the world in which I have ever come into contact with him. He asks nothing more than to be left alone. But should this plainly intimated desire of his be ignored, he is apt to set about the avenging of his disturbed privacy in no half-hearted fashion.

Unfortunately for himself, he carries on his person at least two inducements that tempt mankind to beard him in his own domains. His tusks are pretty things in the way of trophies, and his meat, however deficient in those alluring portions that are wont to be advertised as "streaky," affords a pleasant break in the mutton diet that is naturally common to sheep-stations. Here nature has undoubtedly played him a

scurvy trick. With one hand it has given him out tusks for his own defence : with the other it has implanted in the heart of man an overwhelming desire to possess these very tusks. The touch of irony has cost the life of porcine thousands.

It does not, of course, follow that you will find it an easy matter to obtain these tusks. You will have no chance of riding after him with spear in the accepted fashion that prevails in so many other quarters of the world. The haunt of the New Zealand boar is the broken land and the forest. In order to make his acquaintance you will have to push your way through the tree-trunks where the "supple-jack" hangs from the branches above to entangle its long tendrils about the body of the intruder. The "bush-lawyer" too, with its myriads of tiny spikes, has an unpleasant habit of tearing the flesh of the unwary.

In fact, this mass of vegetation, delightful as it is to the eye, contains innumerable traps and disagreeable surprises for the person who attempts to penetrate its depths. Yet, unless you be lucky enough to find a pig out in the open, the experience must be looked upon as a normal part and parcel of the chase. And on those occasions when he happens to be sought it is seldom enough that the animal is to be met with in the open. It is necessary to seek him among his own couches of maidenhair fern, and to come to grips with him at close quarters.

Needless to say, anything of the kind would be impossible without the assistance of dogs. The ideal

dog for the purpose is obtained by a cross between an Australian kangaroo hound and a mastiff. But these magnificent specimens of the canine race are scarce; thus volunteers are wont to be called up from all available breeds. Occasionally the hunter's enthusiasm exceeds his judgment, and unduly magnifies the powers of a light-weight sheep-dog. Then tragedy is wont to ensue, and a poor little four-footed corpse, ripped up by the powerful tusks, lies among the undergrowth.

For it is the dogs who bear the brunt of the battle. It is their business to dash on ahead and to hold the boar at bay. A pair of well-trained dogs are surprisingly efficient in this respect. They have a cunning fashion of hanging on respectively to an ear and a hind leg of the quarry that is utterly disconcerting, even to the most powerful pig. With the animal thus held, it is the proper thing on the part of the hunter to lay aside his rifle and to run in and stick the victim with the knife. This is the approved method, which, by the way, is frequently and wisely honoured in the breach.

In the plains it is necessary to be content with pheasant and duck and the like, for the flat lands are comparatively populous now, and the life already differs widely from that of the true bush. Indeed, should you ride down from the mountains in the harvest season, you will witness a scene such as is not possible where the tui sings.

The plain by the side of the ocean is sweltering

in the midsummer heat. The sheep and cattle have sought shelter for the most part in the shade of the groves of great willow trees, although a certain number have braved the rays of the sun to drink from the many streams that wind in and out of the green grasses. As for the main roads, they are broad ribbons of thick dust, flanked here and there by hedges thickly starred with red roses. Everywhere rises the scent of warm earth, and from every crack in the soil comes the chirruping song of the crickets in their thousands.

But for this monotonous music the face of the land is very silent. In one paddock many acres of cut thistle lie withering on the ground. Near by are the tents of the men who have contracted for the work; but they are bereft of even so much as a guardian dog. Maize and pumpkin fields, sheep-yards and woolsheds, are all equally deserted. Were you riding through the district as a stranger you might be justified in supposing that all the world had taken shelter within doors. But this would be before you had arrived at the neighbourhood where the rye grass is growing.

From the rye-grass paddocks sounds a bustle that compensates for the hush over all the surrounding district. The rippling eddies of green are hedged about by an imposing concourse of men and horses. From the spot comes the busy whirring of the reapers, and the long-drawn calls of the drivers to their teams. In the centre of the largest paddock is a great elevator

with an engine by its side, and a rising stack to its rear. The harvesting of the rye grass is in full swing.

Half a dozen reapers are working simultaneously on the outskirts of the field, the blades in the long arms of the cutters clicking incessantly as, the one behind the other, they eat into the serried waves of the standing grass and lay them low. But these are merely the pioneers. In their wake come the companies of men with pitchforks, who hasten to the attack on the prostrate rows, and who toss the grasses into lofty cocks.

The gathering of these footmen is somewhat heterogeneous in its elements. Among them are a few of the regular hands of the station. But the majority are volunteers from the neighbourhood; for the district has been ransacked of its manhood at the call of the ripening harvest. There are some, working with purposeful steadiness, who cast a critical eye upon the grass as they fling it, and who exchange expert remarks on its quality. They are themselves the owners of small farms, who, tempted by the liberality of the harvest pay, have ridden in to take a hand with the rest. They are responsible folk, these, as you may judge by the sight of their stout saddle-horses tethered in the shade.

But these solid "cockatoo farmers" constitute only a tithe of the company, after all. There are men from the township, of a lighter bronze than the rest. Their hands are blistered, and they stride rather stiffly from cock to cock, using every effort to keep pace

with their hardier agricultural comrades. Three or four sailors are turning to with a will. If you ask them, they will explain the whys and wherefores of their presence quite frankly. It is a common story. Tempted by the love of the land, they have deserted from a recently arrived vessel. They are now in the process of transformation from the state of the mariner to that of the farm-labourer. They appear, moreover, to have lost no illusions in the process, which is rather lamentable from the point of view of strict morality and poetic justice.

In their neighbourhood a couple of Maoris are busily plying their forks. The elder of the pair, a dusky old warrior, wears the elaborate blue tattoo of tradition in generous patterns on his face; but the countenance of the younger is as nature made it. He is a product of a later civilisation. But the work goes as much against the grain of the one as the other. They would infinitely prefer to be chasing cattle. It is the taste for the liquid and smoky comforts of life combined with a shortage of cash that compels their presence here.

Hurrying to and fro between the elevator and the groups of labourers go broad sledges, each pulled by a single horse. Here is one approaching now, gliding along over the baking stubble with the same easy rapidity that might mark the passage over ice. As the conveyance halts by the side of the cocks the driver, seated Turk-wise on the boards in front, bows his head in necessary resignation as the loads of grass

are piled up at his back. Then, almost smothered beneath the warm, dry heaps, he whips up his horse, and goes sliding and bumping away in the direction of the elevator, to return again for another load in a marvellously short space of time.

All the while the area of stubble grows, until a shout is echoed to and fro across the paddocks, and agriculturists, townsmen, sailors, and Maoris fling down their implements and hasten to the shade of the trees for the midday spell. Scarcely have they sunk down upon the ground when out from the direction of the homestead speeds a sledge. Its progress is watched with anxious eyes, and its arrival is hailed with a mighty cheer; for this is no ordinary sledge heaped up with rye grass. The boards of the vehicle are labouring beneath small mountains of sandwiches and cheese, lofty piles of buttered scones, and stupendous vessels of tea. Presently there is nothing left—only a great content in the shade of the trees.

Out into the sunshine again, where the iron of the implements left in the stubble glows like fire to the touch. Again the song of the reapers rises, and once more the sledges hasten to and fro. But now there is a permanent addition to their number, a hospitable thing laden with cans of tea that plies to and fro in incessant quest of the thirstiest groups. There are various ways of drinking the beverage that once belonged to the atmosphere of the drawing-room alone. It is not beer alone that can be quaffed in great

draughts. The feat is accomplished here with tea—hot tea all innocent of foam !

The sun is sinking towards the distant mountains when the rattle of the machines is silenced at last. For a while the men stand talking in groups, for the day's work is done ; then the horses are untethered and led away from where they have been nibbling the grass. Presently the dusty main road is dotted with the forms of riders. The "cockatoo" farmers plod soberly along ; some wilder spirits, with whom the Maoris have foregathered, start off at full gallop amidst a cloud of dust. The sailors are there too, rocking and swaying gallantly in the saddle. Only a couple of men amble slowly off on their own feet. They are "swaggers" — poor horseless outcasts. But the harvest cheque will mend that, and it will not be long after the last acre is cut ere they are mounted once more. In the meanwhile they will be back to work again in the morning, in company with all the rest.



N.Z. Gov. Tourist Dept. Photo.

THE MUSIC OF THE BUSH

CHAPTER XI

A SHEEP-DRIVE

IT is the hour when, according to the Maori, evil spirits walk abroad in the bush. If so, the perambulations of these unpleasant forces are utterly silent. Had you an ear that could drink in all the sound from a radius of a dozen miles, you would hear nothing beyond the occasional hoot of an owl, the dreamy ripple of the creeks, and a harsh intermittent groaning from the tops of the highest trees. Even this last noise is entirely unconnected with ghosts. The night airs are stirring a dead branch or two that have protruded above the sheltering curtain of the main verdure, and the great strips of hanging bark are creaking dully beneath their force.

If, too, you would mount that loftiest peak of all that sends its dark pinnacle upwards to divide the brilliant clusters of the stars, you would have the opportunity of surveying a swelling panorama of extraordinarily effective neutral tints. Uneven, deep black folds of forest, the clear-cut contours of the grasslands, the narrow gorges lost in gloom, the broader valleys lit up by the silver streams of their

rivers : the whole mystery of the bush by night will reveal itself to the eyes that look down from that peak. But, unless you be bat or owl, I doubt if you would find the journey worth while. Certainly you would not were you long familiar with the land, and had you learned to consider its soil as the prosaic source of necessary bread and butter. The latter consideration will undoubtedly effect much of which mere sentiment is incapable. It is responsible even at this uncanny hour for illuminated windows in a small homestead, and for two rays of yellow light that strike outwards in a timid struggle with the night. They are daring and solitary beams : one might swear with safety that there are no others within a score of miles.

There is a stirring at the lonely spot that is quite incompatible with the hour. From the sheep-yards comes the uneasy trampling of thousands of hoofs, the hoarse coughing of the wethers that sounds with so human a note, the sighing rustle as the fleeces crush up against each other, and the occasional staccato bleat of discontent. In a neighbouring enclosure the horses wait in passive dejection. From the equine point of view it is a bleak place in which to be confined—a bare, hoof-worn spot, innocent of a single projecting blade of grass. Restrained by the unwonted and unsympathetic rails, they have killed time for the greater part of the night as best they might. There was little else to do but to admire the beauty of the stars and the silver light that bathes the

glades and open spaces—effects that naturally leave the animals profoundly unmoved.

It is difficult to cope with the dreamy spirit of the hour. Three men have emerged from the homestead now. The movements of the new-comers are unusually languid ; their very spurs seem to clank in a subdued and minor key. Even the dogs are in a strangely silent mood. As the chains are loosened along the row of kennels there would in ordinary circumstances ensue a wild bounding of furry bodies and frenzied barks of joy. But all that is for the exhilarating glow of daylight. As it is, the dogs content themselves with a few vigorous shakes, and then, with an unusual display of decorum, follow in the footsteps of the men.

The gates of the sheep-yards are opened. A stream of dim white backs surges out in the same mysterious and dreamy fashion that characterises all movement just now. The dogs stand sentinel on either hand ; then, when the yards are emptied, they move forward by the side of the sheep. The procession has begun. The yellow light has died out in the windows of the homestead. All—save the intermittent glowing of three pipes—is neutral-tinted again.

The grey mass of sheep, riders, and dogs rolls forward as relentlessly and as methodically as the waters of a river. All about it are the scents of the night, the cool odours of the leafage, and the warm pungency of the thudded earth. It is a very sober procession that wends its way along the track, now

clear-cut and wondrously distinct in the broad, open light of the stars, now lost for a while in comparative darkness as the great trees bend over to shade the road. On those stretches where the way leads direct and unswerving the men nod drowsily in the saddle, and the dogs pace along in silence. It is only at those places where the track splits into two, or where the route hesitates in the midst of a wide, open space of land that the dull rhythmic patter of the hoofs is broken into by other noises. Then will sound a heavier beat as a rider gallops his horse the length of the long line, while the barking of the dogs breaks out sharply. But even this latter is effected more or less under protest, a circumstance that obtains during none of the more exhilarating hours.

The head of the long, fleecy procession is plunging now through the silver waters of a shallow creek, the splashing of the passage drowning the natural ripple of the waters and silencing the mournful call of a bush owl near by. After this the track mounts steadily, climbing upwards to cross a great barrier of peaks that rises directly to the front. A faint glow stains the sky for the first time just as the great company of the sheep begin the ascent. And as the four-footed toilers climb the mountain-side, so the lights rise in the heavens. They are the usual flags of the dawn—faint rose, scarlet, and then a flame of gold. From the lofty spot to which the sheep have mounted now the ocean is visible at intervals

between the peaks. It is from behind the radiant waters that the sun itself shoots upwards.

On the lofty peak here the change is abrupt and marvellous. A few moments ago all was grey and lifeless. No sooner have they climbed over the edge of the ocean than, without an instant's delay, the great beams have struck the warmth and fire of day into the landscape. The green of the grass and leaves, the grey of the rocks, the blue of the sky—every colour has been painted in in the course of a second or two.

Nor is the change confined only to inanimate nature. The moving flock responds in its own fashion to the sudden transformation of the scene. The white ranks move forward with a greater alacrity or hang back with a deeper obstinacy, just as the passing mood inspires them. The dogs become aggressive, and the shouts of the men echo along the mountain-side. It is the first flower of the day, this, to be made the most of with the comfortable knowledge that a number of hours have already been stolen from the midsummer heat that is to come.

The gullies far beneath are still filled with the aftermath of night. About the trees in the hollows cling the early mists in great white sheets, and clouds, and feathery lakes, from out of which the mountain sides start upwards as though from spreading sheets of veritable water. It is another land down there—a dim and colourless shadow of these warm and brilliant regions above. Far away in the distance, beyond the

crests of a lower range, is a vision of a plain, and of a shining blue band of sea that has eaten away a half-circle from the green land. To one side of this is a collection of tiny specks that you might cover with a lady's handkerchief. It is the township, infinitely minimised, clear as crystal though a score of miles distant. Some time or other these hundreds of stout sheep will be there — when, exactly, it would be unwise to predict, since no element of the railway time-table is wont to enter into a sheep-drive.

Did the unfortunate creatures but know what lay before them their progress would undoubtedly be slower yet ; for this is their last march in life. Their next journey will be in a linen shroud, in the dark and icy hold of a steamer bound for England. It is for this that they have plodded ghostlike through the cool night, and it is for this that they will rest at midday in the shade of the trees at some friendly half-way station. That a journey so full of glamour should end at the point of a butcher's knife ! But they are more fortunate than some others, in that they have no inkling of what is in store. They are, moreover, only too anxious to co-operate heartily with their owners, for their bodies must be cherished in order that their epitaphs may be appreciative and laudatory.

So the long procession of fleeces, guarded by men and dogs, turns to begin its slow descent from the lofty peak. The distant township is no longer visible ;

nothing is to be seen but the green waves of verdure and the hawks floating above. Many hills and many valleys intervene between the spot and the coast. In the meanwhile, push on, for the heat is growing !

CHAPTER XII

TARAKA AND HIS FRIENDS

TO say that Taraka was a full-blooded Maori is to explain only a portion of his merits. Taraka, in fact, possessed many traits unusual in a dweller of the King Country who in his comparative youth had come down to take his place amidst the white men. Domesticity as understood by the latter is as acceptable to the true Maori as are the bars of a cage to a hawk. Yet Taraka had shown a curious predilection for the homesteads of sheep-farmers, and had accepted in part the unpleasant social restrictions that wait upon the more intricate forms of civilisation. He had even grown old in the course of a variety of occupations many of which had approached perilously near to the slur of domestic service.

For all that, the old Maori did not appear to have lost caste among the brethren of his own race who still dwelt in their quaintly carved Pahs, and who from time to time came riding in on shaggy mounts to visit the son of the bush who had wandered beyond its frontiers. They would, at all events, rub noses



ON THE RIVER BANK

with Taraka with every show of respect, and would pay to his words an attention that could be due to no other than a man of much reputed wisdom.

On such occasions the old man's pose adapted itself to the display of a quite unusual dignity. Experience had proved that he was best left alone with his friends when they came. Only once had his employer striven to remind him of his duties at this unseasonable hour ; he had pointed from the empty milk-pails to the expectant cows, and had received in response a cold, blank, and mystified stare. None who saw it could have believed that Taraka understood the significance of a milk-pail, still less that he was familiar with the musical tinkling of the liquid against the metal. In any case the eloquence of the mute protest was such that the employer had good-naturedly persuaded himself that the grievance lay with the Maori. And the latter, in his unostentatious fashion, had seen to it ever since that the position should remain unchanged.

Possibly Taraka himself was fully conscious that he had a way with him difficult to withstand. He had soft, brown eyes, an aquiline nose, and sensitive lips above the blue tattoo of his chin and the grey-white of his beard. It was doubtless to a judicious play of the persuasive features, added to the interesting touch of melancholy common to his race, that the old native owed the comparatively soft groove in which his life lay.

There were some who viewed him with com-

passion, pitying the dusky retainer whose lowly duties must jar against the proud spirit of his people. It took these good folk years to discover that Taraka's duties were neither more nor less than what he chose to make them. Was there cattlework afoot, the Maori was in the van, galloping to and fro, enjoying himself hugely despite his years. But were there calls for Taraka from the woolshed or from the paddock where the dense thistles pleaded for the hoe, then the name went echoing and unanswered over the fertile plain. Taraka had other occupations. The plot of sweet potatoes that he had sown and nursed with his own hands required that deliberate and tender attention understood by none but a genuine lover of that dainty root. How could the household—or Taraka—do without sweet potatoes? Or he might be catching eels in the stream. Eels, again, according to Taraka, were as indispensable to the table of a self-respecting establishment as they were to a Maori palate.

To those who obtained a more complete understanding of the old man's tranquil and placid methods the reason of his brethren's respect became clear after a while. Taraka was no menial in any sense of the word. He was rather in the position of a guest whose courtesy forbade him to disregard his host's wishes provided they were reasonable, but who retained his right to supply his contributions to the household larder in the manner that appeared best to him.

There were occasions, it is true, when the tranquillity of Taraka's life was rudely broken into. The week that immediately preceded a race meeting in the neighbourhood was invariably characterised by an absent-minded attention to the sweet potato plot and by a slender catch of eels altogether unworthy of his prowess as a fisherman. It was a week of strange dreams, moreover, that succeeded each other with a surprising regularity.

It was remarkable, too, that the significance of each grew more emphatic as the period of the races drew nearer. When Taraka approached of a morning, the glow of mysterious excitement in his eyes, it might be taken for granted that he had had a dream. In his sleep, perhaps, he had seen a grey hen swallowing some wonderful grain the like of which he had never seen in his waking moments, since it was of all colours. Now a grey horse was entered to run in the first race on Tuesday, and the rest of the field were of all colours. What greater proof of the coming result could there be than this vision? The money must go on the grey! Further revelations, dealing with the remaining races, were wont to follow. Dream objects, from a bush owl to a turnip-top, were hauled remorselessly forth from their slumberous region to serve in the practical light of day as material guides and portents towards the "spotting of a winner."

And then Taraka went to the races. Mounted on his wiry pony that sported a borrowed saddle and bridle,

he would go padding along the dusty road in haste to verify the portents of his sleep. His return, alas ! was invariably achieved in quite another fashion. It was seldom that this occurred before the fall of night ; the actual manner, therefore, in which he parted from his mount remained a mystery. In any case, it was the sight of the latter, grazing in some forbidden spot in the neighbourhood of the homestead, that heralded the return of the Maori.

Then would ensue the search for Taraka, conducted like the hunt for a strayed hen's egg, although so far as the sought object was concerned, a dormouse would be more appropriate to the metaphor. For Taraka was to be found curled up somewhere on the earth in the neighbourhood, oblivious to racehorses and visions. Indeed, if he dreamed at all, it was of the white man's whisky. Whether his revelations had betrayed or enriched his pocket, this part of the performance remained sternly consistent. But Taraka possessed his own sense of justice. The phase was invariably atoned for by an increased attention to the sweet potatoes and the eels.

It was a Maori friend of Taraka's who in five minutes made for himself a reputation such as many racing men of the district would have given years of their lives to achieve. The man came down from the bush country many dozens of leagues to the north. He was already old, and the grey hairs of his wife, who accompanied him, matched his own.

The arrival of the couple made no more stir than that of any other unknown Maoris. Had they not broken their journey to the township in order to pay their respects to Taraka, I, for one, should never have learned of the event. They rode up on the usual wiry ponies of the kind that is favoured by their race, and before them they drove a third horse, a disreputable-looking chestnut animal, caked from hoof to ear with ancient mud and fresh dust. It might have been a weedy racer; but there were many weedy racers in the neighbourhood. Thus, with the exception of its dishevelled condition, there was nothing remarkable about the horse's appearance.

The visitors remained long in Taraka's company. They were obviously acquaintances of old standing, and the nose-rubbing ceremonies that accompanied the parting were affectionately prolonged.

Three days later the stands and paddocks of the racecourse were filled to overflowing on the occasion of the principal spring race-meeting. Horses and owners had arrived by steamer in imposing numbers, and the *pari mutuel*, or totalisator, to give the institution its local name, was kept busily employed.

The second race chanced to be one of the least important in the programme, and for this the name of no horse of note could be counted amongst the entries. But not one of the spectators was prepared for the sight of a competitor of the kind that emerged to take its place with the rest. It was the disreputable

chestnut, the property of Taraka's friend, the strange Maori. Save for the slight evidence of a perfunctory rub or two, the condition of the animal was much the same as when it had first arrived, and the mud still caked the long hairs of its coat. The horse was bestridden by a down-at-heels jockey who had retired from active service some years before. Almost the only tickets in its favour on the totalisator had been purchased by the Maori owner himself.

I will not attempt to work up any cheap mystery concerning the race. You will probably have guessed that it was won by the chestnut. The shameful-looking creature was first past the post by a bare head. The details of the contest are of no consequence here ; neither does it matter whether the dusky owner was deep, subtle, or merely wise. The main fact is that the old Maori found himself possessed all at once of a sum considerably exceeding a hundred pounds.

Now the average Maori is the most genial and generous soul in the world. None know this better than the more sycophantic of the lower orders of white humanity that are to be met with even in fortunate Maoriland. So as a crowd of these latter, mingled with genuinely delighted Maoris, surged about the owner of the winning horse, his conduct was watched with no little interest.

Never was a keener knowledge displayed of the inner workings of the human temperament. The successful owner withdrew for a while in company with his wife, leaving the small crowd rather anxious-

eyed. Then he handed his winnings, with the exception of some twenty pounds, to his better half, escorted her to her pony, and watched her ride away laden with the treasure.

Not until then did he return to where the groups still awaited him. The gloom of a passing care had departed : his countenance shone with a new light of sublime irresponsibility. Then he led the way to the bar, and remained there with the rest until the last one pound-note of the twenty was expended. After which he offered to exchange his coat for a few more drinks. But the coat was worthless, and the barman in a non-speculative mood. The self-imposed limitations proved annoying just then. But the mere fact of their irritation proved what a very wise old Maori he was.

The mysterious attraction of the *pah* appeals to all classes who have the blood of the Maoris in their veins. Its call would seem almost irresistible to all alike. In the old days marriages between Englishmen of standing and Maoris were more frequent than is the case now. The offspring of such races affords, I think, one of the few proofs of strikingly successful inter-racial blendings extant in the world.

Yet in these folk, brought up amidst all the vaunted advantages of European civilisation, the call of the forest would never seem absent. The result is occasionally shattering to the complacency of the purely Western mind. To one who knows nothing of New Zealand life it may sound sufficiently remarkable

that men between whom and their brethren of purely English descent no social barrier exists, who have been popular members of society, and who have lived in an atmosphere of clubs, white table-linen, and the thousand small functions of the European, should in the end return from choice to the community of their ancestors on the native side.

That girls similarly placed should follow the example of their brothers is stranger yet. Yet I have known instances of the kind that would make the mouth of the novelist water, and that would send a torrent of inky tears from the eye of his fountain-pen. They were girls who had passed the easy existence that corresponds with—but, I think, exceeds in pleasantness—the life of the English provincial centres. That is to say, they had hunted a little, danced a great deal, sipped innumerable cups of tea in fairly crowded rooms, gossipped, flirted, and had indulged in the more serious occupations of the average young woman. They had seemed not only to be within the conventional machine, but part and parcel of its framework.

And then, with the passing of the first flush of youth, came the summons of the wilder life. Its first evidences were unimportant: a more frequent association with the Maoris when they rode in. Afterwards, as the call grew stronger, they would themselves take to visiting the *pahs* and settlements of their native relatives. In the end, when the native side had conquered altogether, they boldly



A MODERN HOMESTEAD



THE CAMP

flung off the trappings of the conventional, and adopted the Maori habits and customs, even down to such minor details as squatting instead of sitting, and of rubbing noses in place of shaking hands.

What a theme for a novelist! But the most cunning could not deal with it unless he had watched one of these transformations for himself. He would in all probability work out the ultimate fate of the girl in sordid and degenerate colours. He would be wrong. Such is the respect in which the Maori is held by his white fellow-countryman that from the sentimental point of view the convert to the native ways of the bush loses strangely little.

She may still visit the friends of her girlhood whenever she feels inclined. The tragedy lies in the fact that such a mood grows increasingly rare with the passage of the years. The life of the Maori, that combines complete dignity with utter freedom, would seem impossible to forsake. In one sense the whites have lost what the Maoris have gained. In the main, however, there is no doubt that, from a purely practical point of view, both races are the gainers, since such episodes tend to increase the intimate ties by which they are already bound.

Of course I have no intention of asserting that such cases as I have cited are common. On the other hand, they are too frequent to be put down to mere chance eccentricity. Indeed, the influence of the Maoris is patent in even those of full white blood who have dwelt much in their midst. They, too, are

accustomed to adopt many of the manners and customs of the fine native race. And they, too, lose nothing by such concessions. Which, with true Western unctuousness, we may say redounds to the credit of the Maori.

CHAPTER XIII


BUSH EVENINGS

IF you would hark back to the customs and habits of a former age it is in the newer lands that such are yet to be met with. At the first blush this would appear paradoxical, yet the reason is evident enough. An existence far removed from cities, steam, and turmoil must, willy-nilly, invest itself with a pre-Victorian setting. More than this, life itself under these conditions ends by adapting itself to its environment. It must be lived, in the main, in the manner of the ancestors.

It is impossible to remain intrinsically modern in an old-time atmosphere, however strongly clothes and speech may war against this retrogression in period. The mere relief from railway despotism—in those places where no trains exist to be caught—is a factor in itself. The horse has retained the merit of awaiting his master's pleasure. One starts when one is ready, a condition of affairs that throws us back a century.

Nature is a staunch friend to this obsolete atmosphere. Nowhere, perhaps, does it come to its aid with greater fervour than in New Zealand, up-country.

The local term comes with a prosaic ring to one who has not seen the land. Yet it is here that the surroundings will bear back not two generations, but a hundred. There are Camelots in the mystical green arches and softly shaded pinnacles of the bush. There are caves, tents, and chapels of the closest verdure. If their walls permit of an opening you will see a stretch of dim, uncanny aisles beyond. There are fords amidst whose silver the hoofs of the knights' horses might well have trampled to the ring of the meeting swords above. The deep hush waits but to be broken by such a sound. The fleecy clouds, too, that soar about the peaks are of a texture that Merlin himself might have woven from his magic.

 The actual habitations, it is true, breed disillusion at the first glimpse. The bungalow, though pretty, is aggressively modern. The shanty is picturesque in a style unfavoured by the singers of tented fields and castles. But, once within, your disappointment has vanished. You are back once more—to the Middle Ages this time. Before you is a mediæval fireplace, a chamber jutting out from the room, wherein the broad flames leap upwards with a mighty hissing. Before the huge piled logs unharnessed knights might well have warmed their limbs. Indeed, by the light of the fire alone there is something that almost suggests their forms in the half-illuminated spurred figures that lounge before it.

These are wonderful fires! Titanic tongues and coils of flame that blaze and flare with a soothing

roar. It is a generous mass of light and warmth that seeks out every nook and cranny to fill it with its yellow cheer.

It may be that the rain streams down in sheets—that is without. Even if a stray rivulet trickle downwards through the roof, what does it matter so long as the blaze roar within, and a tin vessel lie handy to catch the water? The shanty may be the sole habitation within a radius of miles. So much the better. The one dry spot in an ocean of moisture, it is all the drier for that.

When you have ridden hard and far, at a gallop, where you might, but with the horse's legs plodding wearily through the mud the greater part of the way, the loom of the shanty through the sodden grey of the evening is a pleasant sight. Your spent horse will stretch forward to the bit once more; the blood will go coursing through your own veins at a doubled pace. That is but the foretaste of what is to come. When you have turned loose your mount, flung off sou'-wester, cap, and coat, and slipped from those weatherproof gaiters stretching to the thigh—to the fire!

The supreme moments of life steal upon one as the dew falls, without warning. One has come to envelop you now. The driving rain still beats about you, the gusts still lash and whip upon your face; the impulse of every one of your horse's strugglings comes again to you—from somewhere within the depths of the arm-chair. The motion of a vessel is

apparent after the passenger's landing, but that is poor sport. Here it is your own exertions that you know again, strangely glamoured through the veil of consummate rest that is upon you. You see again the swollen ford ; the rushing of the waters is echoed in the hum of the flames. You feel once more the downward lurch, the upward heave of the mare beneath you. The gully where she slid, the spot where she all but rolled from the track is there—in the blaze !

It is as though you had an *alter ego*, one who toiled and battled with the elements in order that the other, at his ease, may enjoy that which the first has earned. By the glow of the fire the strenuous past is dreamy present. The result is a very near approach to the unattainable condition of perfect peace.

Thus even in their death-agony these mighty trees of the bush dispense something of that mysterious atmosphere which is their attribute in life. But without this the blaze might stand upon its own merits. What if its frame be puddled clay ? The fire that laps it is worthy of an emperor. It is a thing of life compared with which coal, however glowing, is sordid. It has its whims, and the study of these is not without its fascination. Fling a log of manuka upon the pile, for instance, and you will have a pretty display of its spleen. From time to time a shower of tiny sparks will fly outwards from the flames to burst in mid-air—myriads of minute rockets, each culminating in its spray of stars.

Yet, for all its sparkling and vivacity, a fire such as this is no shallow-minded bird of passage. On the contrary, it is a stauncher friend than any coal that was ever dug. Place upon it but a massive "back log," and you will find it still blazing to greet and warm you in the morning.

In many instances its finer attributes are not appreciated to the full in those secluded spots where it flames. It exhales a confusion of delightful aromas. Doubtless they blend to perfection with that of tobacco smoke. Yet, did they have the opportunity, who knows whether they would not mingle even more daintily with the perfumes of a boudoir? The scent of the wood is but fitting incense to its last moments, for the timber is exquisite in grains and mottlings. In another place each log would be treasured to another end. Carved, it would grace a palace. Yet here it burns to warm a tired backwoodsman!

But all this, of course, is for the winter, and the Maoriland winter comprises but a minor period of the year. For the summer's evening there is the verandah. It must be an insignificant homestead indeed that does not possess its sheltering outer timbers and roof.

The verandah, as a matter of fact, constitutes the chief living-room of the establishment. If its pillars be smothered in roses and creepers so much the better. Even if they be bare and crude the spot retains its intrinsic advantages of coolness and airiness. The

view from the spot, moreover, nearly always commands a wide panorama of the station lands. There was a retired naval officer—who had come out to Maoriland to beat his sword into sheep-shears—who was emphatic in his appreciation of the verandah as a strategic point. Acting up to his convictions, he would scour the horizon with field-glasses from that point of vantage, and would direct the operations of his station, much as a general conducts a battle, from afar. The theory was a pleasant one ; but in practice it worked out with disastrous results to the retired sailor's prosperity.

But of a summer's evening the importance of the verandah is not to be over-estimated. It is astonishing how much difference may be effected in existence by the mere presence of a few sheltering boards above and beneath, and two or three long and easy chairs ! From there you can watch the setting sun as it strikes living fire from the hill-tops. You can listen to the distant calls of the sheep as they float lazily across the evening air—I hope it is unnecessary to explain that I refer to the calls and not to the sheep. All the while the sky is deepening to a blue-black tint, and the first of the myriad star constellations are beginning to spread their pale blaze.

Perhaps, if the wind blow from the coast, from the back of the nearer sounds will come a low, continuous thundering. It has commenced only with the death of the day and with the growing stillness of the night. It is the roar of the ocean surf



A TYPICAL GORGE

as it goes crashing upon the shore. There may be a dozen miles of mountain land between the homestead and the fringe of the waters. But the sound has travelled patiently up the silent gorges, and here it comes, far inland, booming out its mysterious, soporific note.

At such times the smoke of a pipe rises up in the form of incense.

CHAPTER XIV

WHEN THE RIVERS ARE UP

IN the townships walk men in oilskins and breeched to the thigh, plastered from head to foot with mud that hides beneath its brown splashes the gleam of the tarpaulin equally with the shine of the spur. Overhead the heavy, grey clouds chase each other in sombre sequence, whirling rapidly past, while across the level stretches of the flats and through the funnel-like gorges of the mountains howls and shrieks the wind. Over all beats the driving rain in a downpour that heralds with its ominous persistence the floods to come.

On the flats men watch gloomily the swollen tide of the rivers that rises steadily, implacably, inch by inch, measuring each moment the height of the protecting dam with anxious eyes. Out in the paddocks are shepherds and dogs, driving before them in hot haste the bedraggled sheep to the safest spots of refuge. Through the puddles and the mire they splash, the men behind hustling the laggard sheep along with uneasy impatience, for when the river is rising there is no time for leisure or dallying.

The broad, sluggish streams of the flat lands, although they roll more swiftly on their way, yet pour onward their swelling might smoothly, almost, save for a low, deep-toned murmur, in silence. Far different is it with the slanting, tumbling rivers of the hills. For a time their waters have sped along between their steep banks in comparative quiet, and at their normal level, regardless of the downpour and of the mounting creeks that urge them to rebellion.

The only sign of what is to come is the change in the colour of the stream. Imperceptibly the grey has deepened, become more opaque, until a light brown tinge, growing richer with every moment, has toned the gliding waters to the warning hue. Then, of a sudden, as if it had been but reserving its strength for the effort, up leaps the river in the first full rush of incipient flood. Foot after foot it mounts, clambering up, as it were, alongside the sharply cut bank. Ever more muddy grows the backwash, while in those spots where the eddies writhe most fiercely, and where the adjacent soil is softest, huge blocks of earth, their support eaten away beneath them, drop with a sullen splash into the whirling waters.

Sailing swiftly downstream, curtsying and bobbing in its impotence, comes the pioneer log, the first inanimate victim to the flood. As it rounds a sharp bend in the river the force of its impetus flings it from out of midstream; for a moment, huge trunk though it is, it is turned in rapid circles by the outer

eddies, then once more, recaptured by the main current, it is borne rapidly away towards the distant ocean.

After the first come more, increasing continually in number until the turbulent surface of the water becomes black with their forms. On the morrow they will strew the beach at the mouth of the river, and the townsfolk who collect them will read the tale they bear, and will wonder vaguely whether the waters have not taken more valuable toll than they.

Ever more and more with the rising of its waters has the roar of the river increased, until from afar it dominates the howl of the wind and the patter of the raindrops upon the leaves. To stand on its banks is to have one's frame itself filled through and through with the all-permeating sound, to know a sensation of awe and of giddiness as the brown waste rages thunderingly past. High upon the mountain sides race the creeks, narrow streaks of heaving water, tumbling madly downwards from point to point amid a confusion of foam and spray. The thinnest thread of them all has become for the moment a thing of importance and of power, and, in the manner of most upstarts, takes a peculiar glory in making its presence felt.

And, while the streams are swelling in the full flood of their turbulence, on the roads are horsemen, some plodding wearily through the deep hindering mire, others on firmer rocky ground, galloping furiously onward, flinging the spray from the pools

in watery sheets about them. Few and far between they are, for none would be out when the elements were in such pitiless mood had he not good reason wherefore. Hard they ride and ply the spurs with no sparing, for they have good enough cause to hurry. Before them, and perhaps to their rear as well, is the ford, but the river is rising, and at any moment the present might well be changed to the past.

It is just the difference between the "is" and the "was" that has cost so many a brave man and his gallant horse their lives. So onward they haste at their top speed, peering anxiously ahead for the first glimpse of the river that is before them, impatient for the moment when the choice will have to be made to go on or—to return.

How many will go on the drowning death-rate of New Zealand will tell. Perhaps in the case of one the warning stone which marks the limit of a safe crossing has been but shallowly submerged, or another, if a stranger, knows no test by which to judge; or, again, a third sees with his eyes the torrent and in his mind his homestead just a span removed from the farther bank. He thinks of his wife and of her greeting; that decides his course—and she becomes a widow. For, when once swept below the level of the ford in the mountain rivers, his chance of emerging from the flood with a spark of life is a remote one indeed.

On either hand frown the precipitous rocky mountain sides, rising sheer upwards from the foaming torrent, and, together with the heaving logs and other

spoil of the waters, oceanwards go horse and rider. Well enough the womenkind know this, and so it is that when the raindrops patter down upon the roof and the distant growl of the stream is borne from afar through the watery atmosphere, the wives whose good men are abroad peer outwards from the homesteads with uneasy recollection of former victims of the flood and with anxious foreboding for the safety of their own kith and kin.

But even rivers and creeks, like all else, must find their level at last, and as the patter of the raindrops upon the leaves grows intermittent, then ceases, the swollen waters begin to sink. Slowly, gradually, as if loth to leave the high altitudes to which they had attained, the streams sink within themselves, shorn of their briefly endowed power.

Sullen, starved of the overswelled tributaries that had fed them, they roll onward in diminishing volume and at a pace that grows ever more slow. Then, from out of the waters, yellow and menacing still, inch by inch, foot by foot, rise the banks, free to breathe the open air once more. Their surface as they emerge from their unsought retreat is wet, smooth, and glistening, strewn here and there with objects they had not known before, for the rivers when they are up will snatch with their greedy waters at all things within reach, whether living or dead, and, if they cannot bear them the whole length of their flow, will leave them stranded where a second flood may accomplish what the first has but half done.

Here is an incident of the flood-time that may be of interest, not merely because it actually occurred, but because it is typical of a hundred other occurrences that are normal at such a time.

For a dozen hours the rain has been tumbling down upon the glistening leaves of the bush. The clear stream of the river has become tinged with yellow little by little, until it runs now in a thick and turbid course. So far the waters have risen no more than a few inches in height ; but their murmur has already changed to a threatening growl ; the grey of the sky is unbroken, and every symptom portends a flood to come.

In the neighbourhood of the ford sounds an uproar that drowns the rising voice of the stream. Half a thousand sheep are bunched together in a compact regiment on the level stretch of ground that separates the river from the hills. Riders and dogs are moving rapidly to and fro on the outskirts of the flock. Each is urging after the manner of his kind, whether by hoarse shouts or strident barks ; but the combined efforts expend themselves in vain upon the compact mass of the sheep.

They are hoggets these, young and untried sheep that are the most difficult of all to drive in an emergency, as any New Zealand shepherd will tell you. And there is a crisis in very full being just now. The animals are meeting it with their utmost powers of passive resistance. To their front is the terror of the river ; at their back are the threatening men and

dogs. In the circumstances it seems best to them not to move at all, and it must be admitted that they act up to their convictions with a zeal worthy of a more active cause.

To do them justice, they are probably unaware of the depths of irritation of which they are the cause. They are on their way to the saleyards in the neighbourhood of the township, and that lies on the farther side of the stream! In the meanwhile the river is rising inch by inch. They must cross it within the next half-hour, or the opportunity may not occur again for a week to come. The alternative is direful to contemplate: a slow retreat for some half-dozen miles over the ground they have already covered this morning. Anything but that! The *rendezvous* must be kept at all costs, even at the risk of a few drowned sheep out of the number.

Spurred by the reflection, the shepherds redouble their attack upon the flanks of the mob. Their horses press inwards upon the serried ranks to the accompaniment of ear-splitting yells from the riders, while the dogs, barking wildly, hurl themselves forward at half a dozen points in a body charge. The effort is sustained, and even increased. Nothing could withstand such an uproar of urging. Ceding willy-nilly to the pressure, the sheep begin to move, and for a moment or two hope beats high. But not for long. The hoggets are playing a trick that is common to their species. The flock is merely revolving in a circle about its own axis. As the onslaught gains in



A CORNER OF THE BUSH

frenzy the impetus of the circling fleeces increases. That is all that occurs.

All the while the rain is coming down, and the growl of the river is deepening. In a desperate situation drastic measures are necessary. A couple of men drop from their saddles, alighting with a moist "plop" upon the ground. Racing to the point where the sheep surge nearest the bank, they seize a hogget, drag it with relentless hands to the brink, and with a push and a heave fling the unwilling creature sheer into the waters. They hasten back to deal in similar fashion with another, and a third, until a dozen of the animals are blowing out terrified protests in the stream.

Failure again! The immersed sheep cling like limpets to the bank, while the remainder of the flock, uninspired, manifests a repugnance to the passage still greater than before. For a while an outburst of frank human invective mingles with the varied sounds that rise from the field of strife. Then ensues a pause, the breathless period of expectancy that precedes the final attempt, the greatest endeavour of all!

A shepherd has uncoiled a length of rope that hung from his saddle. He has tied it firmly about the neck of one of the sheep in the river that still retain a desperate hold of the bank. Then, twisting the other end about his wrist, he has sprung into the saddle, taken stock of the waters and the banks, and has spurred his horse into the stream.

The manœuvre works admirably, up to a point.

As the horse steps well out into the river the rope tightens between the rider and the sheep by the bank. There comes a moment when the latter is jerked rudely from its hold. Since the depth of the waters scarcely permits the animal to touch bottom at all, it has no choice but to submit to the tow and to the indignity of being hauled in the wake of horse and rider.

Success at last! The feat is greeted by a tremendous explosion of shouts and barks from the allies that remain on shore. Knowing full well that the moment is now or never, they fall upon the hapless flock with an enthusiasm that puts even the wildest of their previous efforts to shame. Driven helter-skelter, their fears appeased by the sight of their comrade who cleaves the waters with an unwillingness that their dull brains fail to comprehend, the front ranks enter the stream. A great sigh of relief sounds across the steamy air: for where the front ranks have passed the others will go as surely as the body of a wave will follow its crest.

In the meanwhile the pioneer hogget has proceeded on his strenuous course. The passage would doubtless have remained uninterrupted to the farther bank, but for a shallow that lurks almost exactly in mid-stream. No sooner have the animal's hoofs felt the firm ground than they plant themselves down amidst the pebbles in a fierce wrench and pull for freedom. Revenge is sweet, even to a sheep, and the hogget has full measure here. Hauled backwards

without warning, the rider has splashed downwards full into the water. He rises, dripping, to see the forefront of the great procession struggling through the current close at his heels, and to hear the peals of human laughter rising high above the clamour of the stream.

There is nothing for it ! Onwards again, on foot this time, and the ranks of swimming sheep are headed now by a riderless horse, and by a man who, immersed to his waist, stumbles over the rocks, hauling a hogget at the end of a rope. After all, as the ducked man's comrades explain, what does it matter ? In five minutes the last of the flock is across, and a hundred wettings are preferable to a failure at the ford. The drenched shepherd has not sacrificed in vain the dryness that once lay beneath his oilskins.

It was only just in time. Scarcely has the mixed company re-formed itself on the farther bank when the stream comes foaming down in earnest, swelling with a sudden fierceness that would sweep the strongest sheep headlong to death amid the gorges lower down. But all this is behind now. To the front is a clear road to the township and to shelter. Mere rain and puddles are of no account when the passage of the river has been won.

CHAPTER XV

THE BUSH HOTEL-KEEPER

THE bush hotel-keeper is a person of no small importance, wherever he may reside, and, in proportion to the distance his establishment may find itself from the centres of civilisation, the more varied become his functions, whether official or merely devolving upon him from force of custom. To class him solely as an ordinary server of meat and drink would be to do him a wrong which he, fully alive to the exigencies of his post, would be the first to resent. For his house, humble in outward appearance though it may be, represents to the sparse-scattered inhabitants of the surrounding country their one link with the busy outer world. If there is news to the fore, who can circulate it but he? Should the matter concern gossip—for even in the bush there is gossip—he outvies even the traditional village barber, and has, further, in his usual office of postmaster, a supreme advantage over the latter worthy.

The building in which he reigns—possibly within hail of another, but, more probably, miles distant from a neighbour—is impressive only by reason of

its significance. Its architecture is often but little removed from that of the lowly, everyday shanty ; nevertheless, by the inviolable law of the bush, it is an hotel for all that. However miniature it may be in size, a less exalted term of description would almost certainly cause its few planks to fall, shuddering with horror, to the ground. For it represents to all about the hub around which—slowly perhaps—the district revolves, and from far and near the bushmen look to it as the centre of their lonely world. So little, indeed, is the establishment regarded by them in the light of a mere depository for creature comforts that the nearer neighbours, at all events, rarely, if ever, use it for the purpose usually understood to be served by an hotel.

It is the wayfarers, the drovers with their cattle, the stockriders with their “ mobs ” of horses, who, passing through on their way to some distant market, halt by its hospitable door for the business of refreshment solely, and it is from these that the news to be doled out is extracted. Although, during the summer, such visitors may be comparatively numerous, yet in winter, when the roads wallow deep in mud, and the rivers are up, the travellers are few and far between ; the gossip and news, in consequence, filters through in more meagre driblets. But, even then, mine host is the possessor of information of a more vital order. Should the ford lie a fathom deep below the swirling flood, or a crevasse, newly torn, lurk in the sodden cutting, it is he who knows of it,

and spreads the warning word. The very nature of his office, in fact, constitutes him something of a friend and adviser to all men.

Of the number of bush hotel-keepers the proportion of Irish or of Irish descent is astonishingly large. So much do these preponderate, indeed, that one is almost safe in alluding to them as the normal representatives of the class. Fine, jovial fellows they are for the most part, suffering from no surfeit of education, but connoisseurs in human nature, and, mercifully, entirely unvexed by politics, if from these may be excepted the burning questions of the local liquor regulations. Imbued with an intense passion for the turf as they are, it is seldom that a racehorse of greater or lesser pretensions may not be seen grazing somewhere in the neighbourhood of their homesteads, between the more thrilling intervals of training near the far-away townships.

Not infrequently, too, the hotel-keeper is a fancier of sheep-dogs, and in his leisure hours, which, naturally enough, are plentiful, will break the raw youngsters into a knowledge of the work expected of them. Should he prove a successful breeder, his dogs will probably sell for a higher price than his racehorses, a state of affairs somewhat Gilbertian, if the dogs be judged from their outward appearance, which usually appears to deterioriate in proportion to the increased extent of their mental capabilities. Occupations such as these, remunerative enough in themselves, serve as

pastimes without which the winter days would be dull and dreary indeed.

But perhaps one of the most striking traits of the bush hotel-keeper is his inborn hospitality, a quality suitable enough in the abstract sense to his calling. But the host of the bush goes far beyond the ordinary commercial understanding of the word as applied to his trade. For instance, should a wayfarer of reasonably friendly disposition on entering the establishment invite its proprietor to join him in the cup that, notwithstanding its usually dubious quality, cheers, it is seldom that the compliment will not be repaid, in so earnest a fashion too, that its refusal would be the surest means of exit from the landlord's good graces. Viewing the matter from a sordid standpoint, it is difficult to comprehend what advantage the landlord's pocket derives from the transaction. It may be, however, that his policy is not so short-sighted as it would appear at the first glance, for in the main he thrives notwithstanding.

As is the case with a section of his customers, the Maoris, closer contact with the centres of civilisation has the effect of rendering his finer qualities less pronounced. The hotel-keeper in the townships is much the same as his brethren all the world over. Unlike the other, his horizon is bounded by his plate-glass windows and by the bottles in his bar.

His colleague on the outskirts of the cities, although, as becomes the situation, neither the one thing nor the other, yet retains certain characteristics of his

own, not invariably commendable. He is a wary bird, of hawk-like propensities, and by no means free from guile.

He it is who welcomes first of all the incoming bushman townward bent, with cheque in his pocket and thirst upon his tongue. And his especial care he makes it that the visitor's stay shall be neither too short nor too uneventful. He counts it as a triumph indeed, if his guest, a victim of his skilful manipulation, remain for want of the power to move under his roof until the last sixpence has passed from his possession in exchange for the liquid that has grown ranker and yet more rank in proportion as the brain of the unfortunate dupe has lost its faculty of discernment.

Then it is that the bushman, his trip to the township ingloriously arrested in mid-career, returns after a time whence he came, a sadder, but seldom wiser, man. Hotel-keepers of this class, too, not infrequently fill the post of pound-keeper (for even in the neighbourhood of antipodean townships such inconvenient institutions are found necessary), and their neighbours are wont to assert that the straying propensities of the stock in the vicinity increase or decrease in accordance with the slackness or briskness of the liquor business of the hotel.

There are even rumours of surreptitiously opened gates, of lightly conscienced boys bribed for the purpose, and of many similar atrocities ; but, however ill-natured these reports may be, it is certain that, in



THE FRUITFUL LANDS

such cases, the pound yields a revenue to its keeper which he would be most unwilling to forgo.

But then the methods of such as these, parasitical as they are, must not for a moment be confounded with those of the genuine bush hotel-keeper, who is of necessity the friend of all, in whose region pounds are unknown, and who, if he would live at all, must render help to others as he would receive it himself.

One of these Hibernian hotel-keepers with whom I became well acquainted was a fair sample of many of the rest. He was a genial soul, who understood the knack of material prosperity. Like the great majority of Irish overseas he was comparatively unconcerned with politics, unless the questions of the day demanded peculiar attention, when he could become eloquent enough in his own fashion.

Racing constituted his especial hobby ; but in this respect he differed little from ninety-nine men out of every hundred in the district. It was seldom that he had not " a nice little horse " in training. He would enter his competitors for the regular meetings ; but I think that on the whole he preferred a privately arranged match. At such times the solemnity and mystery of his deportment grew portentous. His conversation was wont to be carried on by a series of stately winks, varied by studied blank stares that were in themselves brimful of eloquence.

So far as the contests themselves were concerned, he came out a winner more often than a loser in these private matches, which redounded to his credit,

seeing that he had to deal with men who had very little to learn in matters concerning horseflesh. It was said that those occasions when he lost proved more profitable to his pocket than the days of his victories. But the source of these uncharitable remarks was undoubtedly jealousy; for his enthusiasm was plainly genuine, and I believe that he "ran as straight" as any other horse-owner in the district.

The station at which I was staying when first I met the hotel-keeper was in the near neighbourhood of the township, and was separated from his establishment by a distance of no more than a couple of miles. In common with so many of his colleagues he combined the office of pound-keeper with that connected with his hostelry, and it was the fact of his official capacity that brought us together.

Three horses had disappeared from the station one night. In older countries the event might have caused some excitement. In a land where a good sheep-dog is far more valuable than a mere useful hack of the type of these three, the incident caused no more than a passing interest. Yet there was a certain amount of mystery attaching to the affair. Notice had been sent round to all the neighbours; but apparently no soul within a radius of several miles had cast eyes upon the animals. It was curious, and a little annoying, and there was an end of it.

It was some ten weeks afterwards, when the incident had already been forgotten, that the fate of

the lost horses was discovered. Then they were quite unexpectedly brought into disagreeable prominence. A bill was received from the pound in which was clearly set forth the amount due to the pound-keeper for the corn consumed by the three horses for the past ten weeks. There were, also, of course, the official fees.

It was an alarming account. In less than three months the horses had eaten more than the value of their own carcasses ! It seemed a case of putting new wine into old bottles. I was sent post-haste to demand an explanation, and, if possible, to effect a compromise.

The hotel-keeper welcomed me as a genial mentor might receive a careless parent whose children he had rescued. He produced a bottle of his least new whisky, and insisted on my becoming his guest. It was difficult to get a word in edgeways. When at length I unfolded the paper which bore the account, he took it gravely, and, ere I could intervene, had begun to write a receipt across the sheet. His rather laborious rendering of the performance presented an opportunity for speech. I took it in haste. Why had he said nothing in the first instance of the animals' presence in the pound ? There was no doubt as to their ownership. There was the brand of the station as clear as daylight on the shoulder of each. Moreover, he, in common with the rest, had received word of their loss ten weeks before.

The case against him seemed flawless. When I

had finished I, for one, felt convinced that he must shrink beneath an unanswerable indictment. He merely concluded the ceremony of the receipt, and, ignoring protest, refilled his guest's glass with whisky. Then he spoke at length on the cares and responsibilities that attached to the office of pound-keeper, and ended by handing me the account again as though the matter had occurred to him for the first time.

In short, he was immovable—a genial piece of adamant. The horses were there; he knew nothing more. The charges were there, according to law. He could not alter the law. Now, how could he be expected to alter the law? In a desperate endeavour to pin him on his own ground I urged that the regulations insisted on a pound-keeper giving notice at once of a horse driven into his premises. This he genially denied as he poured a third whisky into my glass. I offered to show him the phrase on his own walls, and rather to my surprise he accepted the challenge.

When we passed outside to where the printed regulations hung, it seemed to me that the moment of my triumph had arrived. There it was in delightfully plain print.

Now the exact wording of the clause I forget; but it ran to the effect that the pound-keeper, in the case of a strayed animal, “must forthwith give notice to the owner.”

“There!” I exclaimed, my finger glued beneath the words.

“Where ? ” asked the pound-keeper.

“Exactly where I’m pointing,” I said, with emphasis.

The pound-keeper shook his head.

“There’s nothin’ about at wanst,” he explained, “not a word about it.”

“Then,” I cried in exasperation, “what’s forth-with ? ”

The pound-keeper looked at the distant mountains. Then he gave the official view of the regulations.

“An’ what’s *fortwid* ? ” he demanded. “I’ll tell ye what it’s *not*. It’s not *at wanst*. They’re sensible souls—them that wrote these regulations. If they’d mint *at wanst* they’d have wrote *at wanst*. But they wrote *fortwid*. Then, sure, that’s what they *mane—fortwid* ! ”

And he stuck to his point ! He refused to budge an inch, despite all argument. In the end I found that, like the great Omar, I evermore “came out by the same door as in I went.” As I rode back to the station in quest of allies in the science of persuasion, I could picture behind my back a more portentous wink than was even wont to emphasise the transactions of a match between “two nice little horses.”

CHAPTER XVI

SHEEP SKETCHES

THE ram was the pride of the station. This in itself was not sufficient to distinguish the animal from many others of its kind in the neighbourhood. In fact, did a sheep-farm exist in all New Zealand that could not swell with pride as it pointed out the one particular fleecy aristocrat upon which its highest reputation was staked, the place was unworthy of the title it bore. And here was no ordinary sheep-farm, no common ram.

The station lay upon the richest of the flat-lands, within easy canter of the township by the ocean; the ram was a proud Lincoln, with a pedigree as arrogant as the lines of his nose. Thus the difference was wide between his method of life and the existence of his less fortunate brethren who inhabited the distant blue of the hills. Neither rough gully nor encumbered mountain-side worried the feet of this pedigree Lincoln. In company with some lesser lights of his own breed, he thrived upon the level sward of thick green grass, fenced off into numerous small and convenient paddocks.

Here he was visited by many folk of varied

grades in life. But whether sheep-farmer, shepherd, Maori, or cadet, the procedure of one and all was precisely the same. They would lean upon a convenient gate, and would ruminate as they stared—it is a curious fact that no conscientious stock of sheep or cattle can be taken in the absence of a suitable place upon which to rest the elbows—until respectful and admiring comments would bring the performance to a conclusion.

There was no doubt that the ram would carry off the chief prize at the coming show. The slow, grudging nods, into which the animal's appearance inspired the reluctant heads of the visitors from rival establishments, were in themselves sufficiently eloquent on the point. Yet the shepherds of his own station were sufficiently wise to leave undone nothing that might make the victory doubly sure. As the day of the show drew nearer the beauty of the ram steadily increased. His fleece was oiled, and combed, and greased with an assiduity that had never been lavished upon the most fascinating ewe in the world.

Even the vainest woman would have tired in the face of that ceaseless endeavour to improve upon nature. But the stolid complacency of the animal brought its own reward. A week before the show his woollen locks, coaxed into innumerable partings, lay in perfect and intricate order upon his broad back.

Then ensued the event that shook the peace of the station to its very foundations. The morning sun rose over the hills to shine on the willow-lined streams

and green grasses of the plain. But the warm light revealed a vacancy the full significance of which was not to be realised at the first blush. The pedigree Lincoln ram was not in his paddock. A rapid but hasty search proved that he was in no other belonging to the station.

It was some while ere incredulity turned to doubt, and doubt to bitter certainty. The ram had disappeared as completely as though he had been wafted from the face of the earth by some evil ovine spirit. Men galloped furiously along the high-roads, each the centre of a rolling cloud of summer dust. They made for the pounds and for the homesteads of neighbouring stations, but in every place within a radius of a dozen miles their quest was equally futile. No one had set eyes on the Lincoln since the day when he was last seen grazing within his rightful domain.

The news of the remarkable disappearance was spread abroad with a rapidity far greater than would have attended that of the loss of an ordinary human being. For the first couple of days it was confidently anticipated that the animal would make his appearance in some unexpected fashion, although as to whence and how not even the most imaginative dared to venture an opinion. When at the end of that period the mystery remained as deep as ever the entire neighbourhood puzzled itself to discover whether the situation demanded indignation or laughter.



AN OLD TATTOOED CHIEF

Undoubtedly the occurrence approached perilously near to a slur on the district. It was clearly out of the question that a famous and familiar sheep of the kind could have strayed abroad of his own free will without suffering instant recognition. It was, moreover, impossible for the animal, unaided, to have emerged at all from the paddock, since the intact fences and gates plainly prohibited any such feat. A theft for commercial purposes was more inconceivable than that of a colossal diamond. The latter, at least, might lose its identity in sections, but a pedigree sheep, butchered, resolves itself into mutton at twopence the pound !

A deliberate stealing, in fact, of an animal of the kind was an unheard-of thing, as impossible as the spontaneous escape of the elusive creature. Here was as pretty a collection of elements as could be conceived for the darkest mystery that was ever concerned with a white fleece. Men rode and drove to common centres for the sake of baffling and fruitless conferences. In the end the community, feeling its honour at stake, grew wrathful, and returned with interest the oaths and complaints of the bereaved station's shepherds. But, in spite of curses, the body of the missing animal obstinately refused to materialise. It seemed inevitable that the first prize would go to the owner of the second best ram.

It was none too soon for the general peace of mind when the pedigree Lincoln was found. Great achievements are often due to unexpected agents. Certainly

none would have thought it possible that the honour of such a discovery would fall to an arrant new chum, a cadet just out from England, who had not yet mastered the rudiments of stock, wool, or grass. It is equally certain that he himself, as he strolled past the great haystack in the paddock that had formerly harboured the mourned Lincoln aristocrat, had no inkling of the fame that lay in store for him.

Not even when his eye was arrested by a narrow but deep cavern in the hay did he suspect the truth. It was a faint rustle from within that gave him the clue. Then, emitting a shout that brought others in haste to the spot, he flung himself down, and dived into the cavern as a ferret glides into a rabbit-hole. To the ears of the small group that had assembled at the spot came the sounds of a violent struggle and of many heavings. Presently the cadet emerged, feet first, dragging by the hind leg the famous sheep !

The animal that came to light was little more than a bag of bones covered with tousled wool. Yet there was not a doubt that the attenuated frame was that of the once proud Lincoln. Amid a chorus of mingled dismay and relief, the attenuated creature staggered weakly away—a victim to its greed and an object-lesson to the most humble sheep in the land. The puzzle of his disappearance was solved. He had become accustomed to eat his way into the haystack until the day had arrived when the depth of the tunnel had confounded his limited senses, and had retained him a thirsty prisoner in the midst of

the food for which he had lost all appetite. His convalescence was a matter of intense interest to the community, which came to visit him *en masse*. This may have proved of greater consolation to the Lincoln than to his owner. For in the meanwhile the show was held, and the first prize went to the second best ram.

They are strangely foolish creatures, sheep. The intellectual virtues of even the lamb can seldom be judged optimistically except with mint sauce on the table. As to the full-grown ewes and wethers and rams, they are frankly full of sheer "cussedness." If you would judge of their true "contrariness," it is merely necessary to come out into the precincts devoted to them on a broiling summer's day.

The chorus of the sheepyards is in full volume. It is an astonishing medley of sound. Treble bleats of complaint from the lambs, deeper groanings from the ewes, joyous volleys of barks from excited dogs, stentorian shouts of "Ho! Ho!" and piercing whistles break upon the still air in a rolling confusion of waves. At the back of it all is the rumble and patter of thousands of small, horny feet, while now and then, when the more salient notes die down for a moment or two, can be heard the quick pantings of the frightened flock, a noise that sounds like the sigh of wind through trees.

The sounds have not over-advertised the activities of the scene. The sheepyards with their labyrinth of open wooden hurdles are convulsed in spasms of

contending effort. Men and dogs are there to drive ; ewes and lambs are present to be driven, if they could only be brought to believe it. As it is, the maternal affections of the former and the youthful terror of the latter cling together in an association, the destruction of which calls for supreme effort on the part of man and dog. At the best of times sheep are a crassly obstinate and perverse breed ; inquire of any New Zealand shepherd on the point ! When outraged maternal instincts enter into the normally objectionable temperament of the ewe the psychological outcome is purely heartrending.

Just now the scene is productive of the most irritating characteristics of an annoying breed. Men are leaping incessantly to and fro over the tangle of wooden rails, as they hurry from one pen to another in a frantic endeavour to guide the living streams into their destined channels. All the while the sea of wool ebbs and flows, now splitting up into rivers running an undesired course, now merging into wrongly placed lakes, whose atoms hang defiantly together, until, as a drastic remedy, the soft slouch hats are wrenched from the heads of the shepherds and are employed with energy to belabour the obstinate fleecy bodies into motion.

There are times when the moral effect of even this process fails. Then comes the turn of the dogs, who have been lining the exterior of the pens in an anguish of pleading eyes and persuasive barks. The signal electrifies them into a

wild explosion of life. They bound like rockets over the barriers, and charge into the *mêlée* with the ecstatic bark of the dog who has found his true joy in existence. The head of a ewe or two may dip in momentary menace, all to no purpose. There is a stampede and a dull thunder of hoofs, and at the end of the rough-and-tumble a proportion at least of the animals has been driven through the right gate into its legitimate pen.

There are some spots that seem to exceed in heat the actual temperature registered. One is a New Zealand sheep-yard on a summer's day. As the sun beats fiercely down the atmosphere is loaded heavily with the sickly odour of the wool, and with the warm scent of the dust-cloud that rises and falls incessantly to powder men, dogs, and sheep.

Quite near by is a plantation of orange and peach trees, a delightful spot of cool verdure, flecked here and there by the gold and the deep blushing rose of the fruits. But so long as the sheep are in the yards the longed-for spot might be a thousand miles away. Not till the last lamb, bleating shrilly, has been rushed into its proper pen to join its youthful companions, and the obstinacy of the last ewe has melted beneath the force of a canine charge, has the time come for a well-earned "Spell O!"

A blessed interval, this, marked by the forms of heated men, recumbent in the dust, by rising pipe smoke, by the exchange of a few curt phrases

of content, and by the loud pantings of the dogs. The circle of peace is inconveniently limited in area ; it is bounded by two oceans of sound. On the one side rise the bass protests of many hundreds of ewes ; from the other comes the plaintive volume of the lambs' treble. But after the leaping and charging, the shouting, hauling, and pulling, every instant of repose is a precious thing, and the bawling of the sheep is completely unheeded.

Nothing remains now but to drive the flocks of young and old to the paddocks that await them, where the enjoyment of the good green grass will drive all sense of bereavement from their thick pates. Presently the ewes are streaming outwards like a white flood that has burst its dam. A couple of men have leaped on to their horses ; dogs have fallen into their allotted places ; and, accompanied by its guardians, the long procession winds slowly away.

Later, the lambs have surged out in their turn in smaller, yet more irresponsible and still whiter eddies. They, too, have gone on their way. But for a couple of human beings and their attendant dogs the sheep-yards are deserted and silent. The reward of toil is now at hand. Now is the moment, in fact, to hasten to the river bank, and to fling off these heated, dust-stained clothes. Then a swim in the still waters, cool and mysteriously shadowed beneath the hanging, leafy curtains of the great weeping willows ! After that a very leisurely stroll through

the orchard. A few peaches would not come amiss ; neither would an orange, for the matter of that. But these questions can be decided afterwards. The first thing is the swim.

But occasionally the first thing anticipated is the last to happen. Quite near at hand, noticed for the first time, rolls a great dust cloud, looming in heavy white against the dim blue of the distant mountains. A smaller cloud detaches itself from the main body and swirls forward with speed. A rider, emerging from the smoky mass, pulls up by the rails. A thousand wethers are coming, he explains. A vindictive "swagger" has passed through this and the neighbouring station without closing the gates. The flocks of the respective frontier paddocks have fraternised with a sublime disregard for ear-marks and ownership. The entire mob is coming to the yards now to be drafted.

The man gives his opinion of the "swagger." Quite so ! Every whit of his eloquence is only just sufficient to meet the case. The river is far distant now—many hours away, in fact—and the advancing cloud of dust very near. It is all in the day's work, of course. Life on a station would be humdrum without such bolts from the blue. Yet the contrast between the shaded waters and the bare sheep-yard evokes reflection.

CHAPTER XVII

MY FIRST TURKEY

IT is many a long day since I shot my first turkey "down under" in New Zealand. That I have not suppressed the story is doubtless owing to the lack of a fitting sense of dignity. Certain episodes are wont to recall themselves with a comfortable glow; others emerge with a sharp sting from the gloomier recesses of memory. The turkey episode comes within this latter category. Yet, after all, why should I mind? There are others who have been fooled by smaller birds than turkeys.

Frankly, the incident was humiliating. This will be clear enough when I confess at the outset that the bird was scarcely wild, yet scarcely tame. The creature, in fact, had attained to that particular status common to many gobblers on the back-block stations. Together with about a score of companions he haunted the neighbourhood of the homestead from motives of convenience rather than from compulsion. Accepting nothing at first-hand from humanity, he "did for himself," and picked up what he might. Seeing that generations of ancestors had lived a similar life, he was now a fairly inde-



AT THE GATE OF THE PAH

pendent bird. More wary in disposition and slenderer of body than his hand-fed, sycophantic brother of the true domestic breed, he was wont to take the air in flights averaging a couple of hundred yards. So much for the turkey.

—A short digression is essential in order to explain the nature of my dealings with the bird. The hospitality of a New Zealand sheep-farm is proverbial. Yet even here, as in all else on earth, there are degrees. The casual visitor to a station in the back-blocks may rely on it that he will be made free of the entire larder of the place. His fare will be mutton, and excellent mutton at that. Now there are many ways of preparing mutton. There are mutton chops, mutton steaks, salt mutton, mutton in the joint, and curious and astonishing stews that have caused the bosom as well as the lowlier anatomy of many a bush cook to swell with pride. Beyond these—I am speaking of places “way back”—there is plum-duff and tea. What more could be desired on the part of a man who has swung in the saddle for half a dozen hours! The aspect of the lightened carcasses was eloquent on the point.

But there were times when the wonted fare was considered inadequate. On this particular station a mark of peculiar appreciation was tendered in the form of a chicken, while the highest honour of all lay in the provision of a turkey, and of a tablecloth upon which to place its dish. It is true that the anxieties of the cook were seldom productive of a

material effect that could compare with that of the honest mutton. It was in the ceremony itself of the act that success was sought, and was never found wanting.

Such an occasion had arisen shortly after my arrival at the station in the character of a diffident pupil of sheep-lore. The unaccustomed swish of riding skirts was heard upon the narrow verandah, and the faint sound had sent tremendous echoes through the stirred bachelor regions of the place. There was no question about a turkey this time ; the heads of the entire flock were in danger.

It would be futile to deny the sense of importance that rose up within me when upon the humble " cadet " fell the choice of bringing home the feathered emblem of the highest rank. Accompanied by an older colleague of the fleece, and by a male component of the visiting party, I set out, gun on shoulder, and—since it was necessary to eliminate the last element of risk !—a dozen cartridges in my pocket.

We knew that the turkeys were within a few hundred yards of the homestead : no presentiment of what was to come obsessed me as we strolled past the woolshed and the sheep-yards out into the open paddock country of the station. The homestead was situated on a small plateau in the midst of the confusion of peaks and valleys. Progress was easy, and, as luck would have it, the turkeys were feeding beneath a clump of feathery cabbage trees well within the confines of the level land.

All that now remained was to advance and to shoot one of the birds. With gun held in readiness I stole over the ground, while my companions, once upon the genuine field of action, held back with commendable discretion. The stalk was successful up to a point. I had arrived almost within range—another twenty paces would have seen the butt of the weapon raised to the shoulder—when the flock of turkeys became convulsed in a cumbrous flutter, and they soared away on the wing for a hundred yards or so.

There was nothing strange in the occurrence ; it had happened often enough before now. I started off once again, to the accompaniment of a guarded chuckle from the pair in the rear. Again the moment for the slaughter had all but arrived when the annoying fowl stretched themselves once more in flight. This time they came to earth at the very end of the plateau. To their front rose the lofty face of a steep hill, a great barrier rising sheer from the plain, with its grassy slopes, clinging scrub, and the small, bare precipices of its slips.

It looked very much as though the turkeys were cornered at last. The advance was resumed with confidence—when it seemed as though Satan had entered into the bodies of the creatures, sending them heavenwards in perverse irony. In short, our substantial lunch was soaring upwards, mounting the atmosphere by the hillside with the nerve and confidence of hawks.

When the flock came to rest far above it had to

be admitted that the aspect of the chase had altered entirely. I own that I experienced a momentary doubt, an indecision that vanished as soon as my eyes met those of my companions. An unquenchable resolve shone there. Their determination that I should not fail was clear. It was equally evident that I was to be sacrificed on the hospitable altar of the station. The next moment I had begun the climb.

There are some episodes that bite to an eternal depth within the memory. The incident of that climb is one of these. For the first thirty yards or so I leaped upwards with all the confidence of one who mounts where angels would never have troubled to tread. Then the gradient of the ascent told, and I came to a pause, clinging to a friendly tussock that projected from the hill-side. Above, a jutting fragment of rock and earth hid the turkeys from view ; below, my companions pointed out the way with remorseless arms. There was to be no escape.

Again I toiled upwards, with a greater effort than before, clinging to grass, and earth, and twigs. When I came to an anchorage once more upon a tiny natural terrace I had failed to catch a glimpse of a single feather, although it seemed to me that I had heard the whirring of wings. The two men beneath had grown much smaller now. The ardour of the chase had entered into them with vicarious enthusiasm. They were urging me onwards with the gestures and calls by which a sheep-dog working in scrub is guided towards the sheep he cannot see.

From the point where I next paused for breath the bird's-eye view of the station and its home paddocks would have appeared admirable to the eyes of one less exhausted. The figures of the taskmasters below had grown minute, and their shouts floated upwards faintly through the still air. But their signals were as unmistakable as was the import of their shrill whistlings. The turkeys were still above me ; they must have taken leisurely flights from time to time as I toiled up on my panting career.

There was nothing for it. But why harrow the reader with the painful details of that stupendous struggle ? After a series of spurts, each more despairing than the last, the time came when I had attained to the summit itself of the hill. By then the state of my mind had become such that I prayed that I might never set eyes on those turkeys again lest even worse befall. But as I passed over the crest, there they were before me—and the next moment the flock had risen on the wing to soar away in an exceptionally lengthy flight. All but one. Why this feathered Samaritan chose to separate himself from his companions remains a mystery to this day. It is probable that the sight of a patch of fairly open bush close by overcame his instincts of sociability. In any case, he flew towards this, and came to rest just within the leafy frontiers of the patch.

In a flutter of new-born hope I sped in his wake across the intervening space. The moment was a crucial one, since the honour of the station lay

centred in the mass of feathers somewhere just ahead. In another moment I had passed from the outer blaze of sunlight into the dim and shaded recesses of the bush. The timber, I have said, was fairly open—for the Maoriland bush, that is to say. The spot was almost devoid of undergrowth, but the tree-trunks were sufficiently serried, and the curtain of foliage above was dense. Hope sank low once again as I scrambled to and fro, crushing underfoot the carpet of maidenhair fern, and peering upwards with anxious eyes all the while.

At last my heart leaped within me. There was a portion of the turkey some eight yards above the ground. I say a portion of the turkey out of respect for accuracy, since the whole of the bird was not visible. From out of a tiny gap in the verdure protruded his tail. Undoubtedly the astonishing creature had now developed a characteristic of the ostrich. In spite of their stealth he cannot have failed to hear my movements. It was evident that he flattered himself that he was entirely hidden, oblivious of the betrayal on the part of his tail.

The difficulty that now confronted me had entirely altered in character. The distance that had separated me from the bird had been too great : now it was too small. The result of a shot at such close range could scarcely fail to be fatal to the symmetry of the bird's later appearance on the table. Yet, try as I would, it was impossible to obtain a sight of the creature from any other point. Each tentative retreat to a

reasonable distance resulted merely in the intervention of trunks and foliage, and in the disappearance of all evidence of the victim.

No alternative remained. The delay had already been sufficiently long to tax the confiding powers of the bird above. It was necessary to act. Imbued with the sensations of a murderer, I raised the barrel, and fired. The result of the shot was a downward shower of leaves and feathers. But the remnants of the tail slewed sideways like a ship settling to her doom—and remained! The corpse of the turkey was firmly cradled above. Utter perversity had clung to the bird even in death!

An attempt to climb the great smooth tree-trunks was out of the question. The pathetic body could only be dislodged by the same force that had blown the life from it. In pure desperation I fired again—and the turkey came down in sections!

Had I been wiser and more experienced I should have known exactly what to do at that juncture. I should have left the mangled remains upon their bed of maidenhair fern. An open confession of failure to the rest would have been Macchiavellian only to a certain point, since I could honestly say that even here I had no whole turkey. As it was, I gathered up the remains, and descended the hill.

As for the rest, it may be imagined by the reader as easily as I could tell it. From the humorous tongues of the experienced what mercy was to be expected by an unsophisticated being who had set

out after turkey and had brought home hash ! The necessary ray of comfort was supplied by the guest-in-chief, in whose honour the fatal expedition had been planned. Her words sounded like the sweetest music, and when they had ceased I had become the most ardent of all her worshippers. And she went out of her way to say it : she infinitely preferred turkey soup to the bird *au naturel* !



A WAHINE

CHAPTER XVIII

THE CALL OF THE TOWNSHIP

THERE comes a time when the township calls. At such periods is wont to rise up within every bush dweller alike the desire for the company of a multitude of men, a longing for street noises, a craving for wider talk, and a sight of the thousand and one objects of which the bush is innocent.

It matters not whether the man in the back-blocks has been born there, or whether his presence in the bush forms only one of the many vicissitudes of his life. The gregarious instinct is equally potent, and breaks out in periodical spasms that shatter the tranquillity of the green eaves and nooks, and that send his thoughts careering wildly in the direction of the centres of men.

At such times you may observe the symptoms of the call at the far-away homestead. In the stock-yards waits a horse. Compared with his mud-stained companions who are grazing without, the animal is a glorious paragon of equine coquetry. His saddle has been rubbed with soft soap ; his coat shines from the friction of many groomings, and his legs are

clean and spotless. It is clear that he would rather be with his friends in the paddock ; but perhaps at the back of his mind lurks the memory of the few occasional days when he has existed beneath a roof, and when he has made the acquaintance of many strange horses in neighbouring stalls, and has fed gloriously upon hard corn instead of upon the grass blades.

Within one of the homestead rooms is a scene of confusion. A worn coat and hat lie upon an ancient saddle in a corner : stained dungaree trousers rest carelessly where they have been flung on the top of a volume of Lindsay Gordon. Massive boots—clumps of soil beneath which the leather is only to be suspected !—repose heavily by the side of the bed, and the floor is littered in unusual fashion with a strange medley of objects.

From out of the chaos is emerging a transformed man—a creature resplendent in tweeds, immaculate breeches, shining and comparatively light boots, and glittering spurs. It is a butterfly day, this ; the shell of the chrysalis is on the floor ! The thing has been effected at the cost of some rummaging, and not a little work with brush and boot-polish. But it is done, and the man is ready for the road that leads to the township.

As he sallies out from the house there are volleys of anxious and clamorous barkings from the direction of the kennels. Then ensue howls of delight on the part of three or four of the dogs whose loosened chains

have fallen with a rattle to the ground, and bitter whines of disappointment from those whom an unkind fate still retains prisoners.

A minute later the man has led out his embellished horse from the yards and has mounted. It is a momentous and joyous moment this, the beginning of a plunge into a new and noisy world. The dogs know all about it; and the small, furry group surges to and fro in mad exhilaration. Then the procession has started in earnest, the horse at a hand-gallop, and the dogs stretched out in full cry behind. But they will have to alter their pace many times ere the hills and dales that separate the solitudes from the township have been left behind.

The beginning of a track is necessarily vague. Lest the term "beginning" be found as vague as the road, let it be here understood to imply its start from an up-country point of view. Townsfolk might dub the spot its end. But for all they know of the matter they and their opinions may safely be ignored.

The inception of such a highway is as diffident as the first tricklings of a river source. There can be but one station that lies the hindmost. It is before its homestead that the road virtually has its birth. The owner of the run, almost unaided, has worn the thin thread that winds here and there.

It is not a path for everyone. In common with the sheep-farmer, and perhaps a couple of others, it shares secrets that it would scorn to divulge to a

chance wayfarer. For a space it will hide, snake-like, beneath a broad bed of fern. Happening upon a collection of flax-bushes, it will hesitate between a dozen clumps until, agreeable with the proverb, it is lost.

Then will come the time when it essays the climb of a steeper hill than the rest. For a while it clammers up, faintly as a spent mountaineer. With the upward surge of the first "bad place" it has frankly disappeared. If it exists at all, it resembles an ocean track in that its line is imaginary. The big, burned tree-stump upon the ridge is its goal, the owner will explain. It is best to take the route where the cabbage trees hang over the slip in preference to that which is most direct. This is the utmost that the run-holder can offer in the way of direction.

Yet for him whose horses' hoofs have made it there is an ever-present fascination in watching the progress of this highway. Its accentuation as his flocks increase is pregnant of cheerful meaning. The day will come when that trail will continue far out behind his station. The part that is his will be raised to the dignity of a thoroughfare then—but that is for the future. As it is, the meagre thing winds onwards, knowing many vicissitudes. It will dive from a steep bank into the waters of a rushing river. It will hurry across the rocky bed, reappearing at the other side in a clear-cut line through the bush, at whose edge the little fantails dart their zig-zag flight.

Farther on the rider may pass by where some tents are stretched in the midst of a clearing. From the spot comes the ring and thud of axe-blows. It is the first settling of a squatter. The canvas roofs, a few dull white flecks, stand out timidly in the midst of their overpowering sylvan surroundings. Yet, once past this, the track has gained in importance. It has stamped for itself a firmer path than that of the first stretch. It has eaten its way clean through the feathery fields of manuka, and has dented a passage upon the soft pa-pa rock.

To the left of it now lies a small homestead—a rude square building with a few planks to serve for its verandah. The structure marks another stage in the importance of the track. The evidence of a tending hand is now visible. Where the surface is boggy there are branches placed in layers beneath. Where it hangs, seeming almost to swing in mid-air upon a mountain-side, there is a primitive culvert here and there. Then, after the passing of half a dozen further homesteads, set widely apart, the horses' hoofs rattle upon the first bridge. It is nothing but a few hewn planks that span the point where the converging sides of a gully permit no foothold. Yet it is an important thing, in that it marks the point where the utter dominion of nature ends.

All the while the track has widened. There comes a fork where another juts boldly into it—and it is no longer a track. It has become a road that bears

buggies upon its breast. Its surface has become polished at those spots where it has attained to years of discretion. It no longer leaps up and down in those uncomfortable fits of exuberance that still possess its boyhood farther back. It swings to right and left in sober windings, avoiding thus the spots that offer such unseemly temptations. Farther on, where a precipice yawns, there is a rail by its side. The slips in the soil are less numerous ; the landscape itself has become smoothed.

There is grass everywhere, verdure that swells and sinks in rounded mounds and valleys. Such bush as breaks the surface stands but at wide intervals in the folds of the ground. The bungalows, too, have altered in character. Tinted and spacious, they sit upon level swards. About them are blue-gum trees—in plantations ! And but a couple of hours or so before the rider had threaded his way along the thin strip that alone the piling ocean of forest permitted ! It had seemed everlasting. Yet here its ashes have fed the grass, and upon its site sprouts the foreign eucalyptus.

By the side of the road shows the prickly circle of a thistle. Beyond is another, and farther on are more yet. They are emphatic signs of civilisation. The bush has never known the weed, nor will it in its primal state find room for it. There are flights of chattering minah birds now, new-comers likewise,

that have not dared to penetrate within the farther solitudes.

The river is here once more. Shorn of its turbulence, it winds to meet the track in a broad sheet of languid water that rolls forward peacefully between willow-lined banks. A wide timber bridge spans it. Its surface echoes to the stroke of many a hoof, for the riders are frequent now. Upon the farther side stretches the circle of a racecourse, half its radius backed by a tall belt of macrocarpa, while the wire fences of the paddocks in the neighbourhood are broken down in places to give way to the timber jumps of the draghounds.

Half an hour later the street of the township opens out before the rider. It is as though he had passed with a single step from the outer silence to a clamorous vortex. Men call to him on every hand. His horse, eager for the stable, frets with impatience as the frequent pull upon the rein brings him to a halt. Invitations are tossed across the street. There is talk of tennis and polo. And a few hours back the newcomer, a very Selkirk, was gazing upon the heaving grandeur of a lonely land !

But he has his business here for all that. It is to pick up again the threads that stretch from the great outer world. The beginning of a war, the creation of a new state, the dissolution of an old régime—of all this he may learn for the first time. There are the London weekly papers, five weeks old, but the latest obtainable. There is gossip, a comparison of notes with other

sheep-farmers, the unwonted atmosphere of a drawing-room or two, and possibly music. It is a well-filled week. He passes it in clothes that show creases of disuse, in blackened boots, stiff shirts and collars. Then he returns once more to solitude and the bush.



A WARRIOR

CHAPTER XIX

GOING TO THE RACES

THE streets of the small township are in a state of unwonted animation. The prospect of the morrow's races has made a magnet of the spot. Not only has it sucked the surrounding districts dry of their inhabitants ; it has drawn many others from the remoter parts.

Station-hands, visitors, townsmen, and Maoris stand in chatting groups beneath the verandahs that jut out in an unbroken line from the row of shops. It would seem as if even the elder Maori women huddled on the kerb had lost some of their native impassiveness as their eyes scan the frequent forms of the passers-by.

Along the broad, straight road that leads inwards through the paddocks comes a moving procession of dust columns. From out of these, as they enter the street itself, emerge horses and riders, while at rarer intervals come buggies filled with men and women. The latter, with their escorts, are swallowed up by the doors of the two hotels that face each other from across the street, and the wooden balconies above are already aglow with bright-coloured dresses.

From the spot where the passenger steamer lies heaving in the bay, the tender comes hastening shorewards. The top of her small cabin as well as her decks are closely packed with the incoming passengers. The rooms of the club-house are already well sprinkled with figures, and comers and goers follow hard upon each other's heels. A little while after the launch has ground its side against the wharf the visitors throng in many batches within the doors of the club.

Simultaneously with their advent the place has blossomed out into a scintillating paroxysm of life. The low hum of voices gives way to a babel of sound. The two harried waiters flit to and fro with glass-laden trays in the manner of human pieces of india-rubber that are continually drawn out only to be snapped hurriedly back again.

The visitors who have come from the larger centres are distinguishable from the rest in that their costume as a rule, although not necessarily smarter, is at least one fashion ahead of that of the others. Indeed, the clothes of many, were they seen upon the person of a mere new chum, would doubtless breed disparaging remarks on the subject of foppishness. But such as these may give free rein to sartorial fancy quite unchallenged. They have won their spurs as amateur riders and racehorse owners, and their names are familiar to all within a radius of hundreds of miles.

Within the club itself the local colouring is of necessity more or less subdued. It is by gazing from

the windows upon the thronged street that an insight into the popular mood may be gleaned. At one corner, claiming a broad space for their persons among the general crowd, stands a formidable knot of station-hands. They are filled to the brim with the spirit of the hour, since a gathering together in such numbers forms an epoch in the life of each. The unwonted communion has endowed even the veterans with the hilarity of boyhood.

Their exuberance finds vent in friendly but outspoken comments on the male passers-by. Woe betide the rider whose seat they find cause to deplore or even him whose horse is addicted to the cutting of unnecessary capers. They are believers in strict business. They have no sympathy with a "flash" horse, and they will let the owner know it.

Now and again a widely popular station-owner will attempt to urge his way with speed past the gathering. The men will bear clamorously down upon him, teeming with appeals to him to partake of their hospitality at the hotel bar. The invitations are earnestly meant; for it is their "day out," and they claim the right to "shout" with enthusiasm. He will need to be a strong-minded man who can resist the spontaneous cordiality of the appeal.

Now there is a stir and a quick movement towards the spot where two racehorses are being led in the direction of the open country. A throng of men surges about them, bringing them to a halt at many points on their way. The sheltering cloths are lifted in

order that a multitude of critical eyes may gaze on the form beneath. Strangely enough, sombre-coated men, of countenances of a type that elsewhere would bespeak their owners stern strangers to race-courses, are as eager in their scrutiny and comments as the rest. From which one gathers that in a bush township the points of a horse are beneath the notice of not even its most austere inhabitant.

As evening falls the township attains to the zenith of its glory. The street illumination may be comparatively dim ; but there are sounds of pianos and concertinas, while even from the club itself comes the rousing chorus of a hunting song. It is obvious that those within have been moved to the core by the festal occasion.

In the bar of one of the hotels a Maori racehorse-owner, confident of a forthcoming win, is supplying refreshment to a circle of shepherds. The latter, out of deference to the Maori's hospitality, conceal their scepticism as to his chances. For the shepherd, though pastoral, is human.

In another part of the building a youngster, newly landed in the Dominion, has collected about him a group of the most disreputable " deadheads " in the township. He sees a gallant stockrider in the person of each loafer, and, happy in the illusion, he does not grudge his freely spent money.

Thus the evening passes, until in the bay the steamer's lights have vanished behind the promontory that looms in clear-cut blackness against

the background of the stars. Shortly afterwards the illuminations of the township die out one by one, and the community is sleeping in preparation for the strenuous doings of the morrow.

As to the races themselves, why describe them here? One horse race is strangely akin to another, all the world over. Let us imagine them concluded, the events won and lost, the procession of riders, horses, and buggies safely back in the township again.

The streets of the place are once more at their gayest. The station-hands are there again with clanking spurs, and townsmen in white duck lounge here and there. But the gathering differs from the previous one in that its atoms, instead of coming together, are separating in all directions. The little steam launch is at the wharf again, whistling energetically as she prepares to carry the passengers to the large steamer floating lazily in the bay.

As the departing sheep-farmer emerges from the hotel a number of wiry, useful-looking mounts stand attached by their bridles to posts, until one, becoming impatient, flings back his head with a jerk. The much-used leather snaps, and with a kick of his heels he is off down the street, rejoicing in his temporary freedom. But the liberty is short-lived. A minute later he has been "rounded up" by an unfeeling stockman, and a stout cord puts an end to the animal's roving ambitions.

Within the livery stable is a double row of horses of every size and form, dimly illuminated by the light

of a hanging lantern. Some are absorbed in crunching their food ; others, whose owners possess either less cash or less consideration, fasten, eye their more fortunate companions enviously.

The sheep-farmer has entered the stable, and presently he is clattering out of the yard, the chestnut fresh and springy, shying and dancing past the seldom seen lights of the stores.

Having seen that his "swag" is firmly attached to the saddle, he waves "good-bye" to a group of men in riding breeches who are sitting in the club verandah, and, giving his horse a free rein, he passes down the poplar-lined street at a swinging canter.

As the houses grow more scattered, each is enveloped in masses of green foliage, the wide verandahs smothered in roses and creepers, while the scent of the wattle is strongly wafted on the cool night air, and the ceaseless chirrup of the crickets blends strangely with the dull moan of the sea. Then out from the shadow of the poplar groves, and the hoof-beats grow duller to the ear as the metalled road gives place to soft, yielding earth.

And now all around lies the grassland in gentle undulations, each shrub, each patch of manuka standing out clear in the moonlight. The sheep kingdom has been entered, and by the side of the road looms the square outline of a large wool-shed, and close to it a labyrinth of pens. Now past the lights of the homestead nestling among massive

fir trees and blue-gums, while a chorus of barks from the kennelled sheep-dogs greets horse and rider. Now the hoofs thunder on a fragile wooden bridge that spans a small creek pouring its waters between the steep banks that it has cut for itself, and narrower and narrower grows the road, until it resolves itself into a track a few feet broad.

Bolder and more lofty grow the hills, more and more the track falls, rises, and curves to right and left. On, on, over a sharp ridge, and there ahead lies the bush. Looming dark and sombre it stretches over valley and hill as far as the eye can reach, the topmost masses of that wealth of foliage silvered in the moonlight. Mysterious and cavernous seem the recesses in that dense vegetation, the giant trees over-topping their humbler brethren, who, in turn, have a close layer of tree-ferns at their feet, the whole interwoven with innumerable coils of graceful creepers.

Thus appears the fringe of the bush from the open, and a morepork hidden in the leafy realms hoots dismally as man and horse plunge into the black darkness within. But unmindful of this continues the ceaseless thud of the hoofs, now beating quickly as they clatter down a sharp slope, now slowly as they struggle up a steep ascent, with an occasional stumble over the tree roots that twine snake-like across the track.

Ahead appears a sea of light, and, passing through a clearing, the dense arches of foliage and wilderness of fern and nikau palms stand revealed in all their

luxuriant beauty. In the centre of the clearing, where the pale light of the moon beats most strongly, a long deserted and overgrown Maori "whare" has adopted an air of the unreal, and appears ready for any ghostly inhabitant to take undisputed possession.

A short glimpse of this fairylike scene, and again the inky darkness blots all from view. An occasional touch at the knee warns the traveller that the track is narrow and the trees are many, but, without a guiding touch of the rein, the horse steadily pushes on, following without fail the track which human eyes might try in vain to distinguish.

Save for the flapping together of dead branches and strips of bark stirred by the breeze high above, the bush has been wrapped in an eerie stillness, but now a distant murmur is heard, growing louder each minute until it resolves itself into a dull booming. A few more paces and across the track swirls and eddies a broad river flanked on either side by precipitous bush-covered banks. The line of broken water marks the ford, and just below this a tiny water-fall mingles its lighter notes with the rushing moan of the waters.

The horse has splashed through the stream, and has mounted the bank on the farther side. A canter through a grove of palm-like cabbage-trees, and once more the bush falls away, giving place to open country. All around tower lofty, grass-covered hills, thickly covered with the blackened stumps of trees, the only remnants of the once



MAORI WOMAN AND CHILD

all-covering forest. Here and there a clump of flax bushes gives forth a gentle rustle as the soft night breeze stirs their long leaves and an occasional small patch of "reserve" bush throws its long shadow down the steep hillsides. Groups of scared sheep, sharply outlined in the moonlight, rise and scatter with a flurry and pattering of feet as man and horse swing along.

And now the track broadens; gates become more frequent, and there in the shadow of a mountainous spur shine the lights of the homestead. A strong-voiced "cooe" is answered from within as the squatter flings himself to the ground, and the ride is over.

CHAPTER XX

THE MAORI AT HOME

IF ever there were a land fit to serve as a casket for a wealth of weird legends, of wondrous happenings, and of the tales of evil spirits that roam by night, surely that land is New Zealand. Even now, in those increasing areas where the felled bush has yielded up the secrets of the soil to the grass lands, the very curve of the hills as they mount skyward, the very hollows of the gullies as they bore their sinuous way deep down below, would seem pervaded by an atmosphere such as no ordinary hill or dale ever knows. It is almost as though Nature herself were brooding over something intangible that oppresses her, shine the sun never so brightly.

And, if this be so among the smooth-faced, cleared lands, what of the recesses in the silent solemnity of the bush, where such sunlight as can penetrate the upper realms of green serves, with its occasional small pools of light, but to emphasize the gloom of the leafy caverns and aisles. It is in such spots as these that one walks in the presence of another—or so it would appear—though the nearest

human being may be distant a score of miles. There is such a wonderful hush in these haunts of silence, a breathless prelude which leaves the intruder in a never-ending state of expectation—of what he knows not.

It is among surroundings such as these that the Maoris have lived since the big canoe first brought their ancestors from over the seas, and so far as Nature can stimulate the sense of the supernatural common to the human breast, she has spared no effort to succeed in their case. That the race is poetic goes without saying—without this attribute the supernatural sense would be lacking—but to what extent the faculty was imported with them, or how far they have acquired it since their sojourn in the three islands is doubtful.

They may, indeed, be classed as poets and warriors beyond all else. Imagine an old-time war-canoe in the full panoply of its battle array, with lofty, carved prow and stern, filled with two score of massive-limbed fighters, stealing softly across a lake. Imagine yet further the waters upon which it floats, still as glass, unruffled except where the softly dipped paddles curl them into a clear-cut wake, shining a steely grey in the evening light, save where the banks cast their dark but well-defined shadow.

All about, circling the waters of the lake as though they loved it, the mountains rise. From the water's edge even to the topmost peaks towering

in the sky the walls of verdure mount, bank after bank, tier upon tier, until the upper festoons of foliage would seem to be held aloft by the power of some magic hand. And over all is the stillness and hush of some enchanted land. It is in places such as these that romance has blended with the fighting spirit in the warrior's soul.

Ruthless the Maoris may well have been : in tribal fights they took warfare seriously in the olden days. But, to their credit be it said—although the comfort derived by their victims was probably infinitesimal—when they slew, it was as sentimental warriors ; it was not as mere instruments of butchery that they roamed the land armed with *mere* and spear. Their system of nomenclature alone has redeemed many of their less laudable deeds from the darker line of criminality which they might otherwise assume !

To give an instance : the relatives of a Maori chieftainess who had suffered insult at the hands of some members of another tribe in the neighbourhood determined upon vengeance. This they enacted by burning the offenders to death as they slept at night in their dwelling. The deed itself would hardly seem worthy to rank among the heroic. Yet the name by which the spot—upon which now stands a flourishing town—is known, lends a certain touch of glamour to its association. It is Hawera, which means nothing less than Hot Breath. Another designation, which, though more crude, is not wanting in artistic merit, is that of Brain Pot, applied to a hot water pool near

Rotorua, in which the victorious tribesmen were wont to boil their victims' heads.

But, beyond these grimly jocular fancies of a warrior's mind, there are names which speak for themselves: Weeping Waters, the Place of the Water-Pigeon, and a thousand such, both graphic and picturesque, which form an index to the poetical nature of the Maori mind.

Apparitions there are in plenty, and, as the Maori will tell you, they haunt both the gloom of the bush and the still inland waters. On the eve of the great eruption of 1886, Sophia, the Maori guide, saw a phantom war-canoe with its ghostly crew steal silently across the waters of Lake Tarawera by night. Then there is the charmed island of Mokoia, that earthy gem set in the midst of Lake Rotorua, where the shades of the famous Hinemoa and her lover Tutanekai may occasionally be seen.

In Maori legend pure and simple it is the wizard who plays the greatest part—the wizard who accomplishes marvels, especially of the physical order. Magicians such as these it is who have transposed the body of a mountain itself, or have caused the waters of a lake to rise until they inundated and buried beneath their liquid weight for ever some village whose inhabitants had insulted them, wittingly or otherwise. The majority of these gentlemen—whose personalities, by reason of their extremely matter-of-fact, though superhuman deeds, do not provoke anything beyond a languid interest—appear

to have been of too aggressive a disposition to have made their presence as neighbours desirable. They would seem to have abounded more especially in the Thermal District, and are, no doubt, responsible for the presence of a considerable quantity of geysers and eruptions !

A far more subtle and interesting subject is, however, that of the evil spirits—the malignant ghosts which roamed, and still roam, through the darkness of the bush after nightfall. Assuredly it is to the inmost recesses of the great silent tracts, when the sun has ended his battle with the sombre screen above, that, did such beings exist, they must fly. And if a Maori must travel a lonely road by night—the reason must be a good one, for it is a journey that he dreads—it is here that his heart will turn to water. He will give out long wailing cries ; he will sing, not for the sake of singing, but because he must, since it is by noises such as these that the evil spirits are prevented from wreaking upon him their insatiable vengeance. There are paths in the bush too, paths that neither horse's nor man's feet tread above a dozen times a year, which lead past the special horror associated with some particular point—an old *whare*, perhaps, a Maori hut, dismantled, fern-grown, and accursed. To pass such an object in a miniature clearing, with the moonlight streaming white upon its ruin, and the black, circling walls of the bush all around, may bring tentative shivers even about the spine of a European. But

to a Maori who knows—from ocular demonstration, as he will swear at times—that here is the trysting-place of the evil ones, the place is an abomination of terror.

After such spectres as these the power of spells and of the evil eye would seem tame by comparison. Yet, although the statement may appear a wild one, their consequences have frequently proved far less innocuous. There is no record of a Maori having ever been physically molested by the spirits whom they fear with such a consuming dread ; there are, however, not a few instances of the disastrous effects of the incantations of a Tohunga, or of one gifted with the power of the evil eye, upon an enemy. Whatever may be the reason—the Maori is certainly fatalistic to a degree, and also more sensitive to mental influences than almost any other race that exists—some astonishing endings to the practice of witchcraft of this kind have undoubtedly occurred.

In a case where a spell has been worked, and the victim, literally and metaphorically, cursed to death, the proceedings have been these. A sign and the message have been sent to the victim, and the latter, from the moment of their reception, considers that his spirit has begun to pass from his body. He calls his relatives and friends about him, and they, equally convinced as to the inevitable end, surround him with lamentations and *tangi* (weeping). Thus they await the end, and it is said that they do not often wait in vain.

Witchcraft of this order—whether potent in actual practice or no—rings strangely in these days of the commonplace, yet the Tohungas still represent a force to be reckoned with by the Maoris. Marvellous it is, too, how this atmosphere of the magical and of the supernatural has blended itself with that of the up-to-date colonial town—the bush township, with its telephones, its freezing works, and its butter factories.

To peruse a local paper and to find within its correspondence columns a question by a Maori (not improbably the Tohunga himself) as to the legality of the art is sufficient to make one rub the eyes in wonder. Yet before me lies such a paper, and in it such a question—asked in words sufficiently prosaic to fit an interrogation regarding a remedy for toothache or the like. The question—a perfectly simple one, reproduced in English beneath the Maori setting—has reference to the legal position of a Tohunga who dispenses medicine and uses incantations. Conceive the shade of Merlin appealing to, say, the *Daily Telegraph* upon such a point, or a similar interrogation on the part of the three hags in Macbeth addressed to a modern journal for the home! Yet the Tohunga, both in solemnity of bearing and weirdness of aspect, need yield nothing in dignity even to the most mysterious figure that the past can conjure up. The editorial reply is a marvel of cautiousness. Should any medicine which causes death be used, the act would be a criminal one, it says ;



MAORI VILLAGE SCENE

in the case of the employment of incantations, on the other hand, the Government would not take action. The answer, though clear enough in itself, represents the mental attitude of the Government in a somewhat ambiguous light.

Of fanaticism in its cruder sense instances do not abound in Maori annals. The last movement of any importance was that of the Hauhaus, in 1864. Hauhausism, a new religion preached by a native of the name of Te Ua, owed much to a blend of Christian and pagan forms ; it propounded free love and enmity to the white man. Its priests possessed a divinity of their own, and a special advantage offered to all believers was invulnerability in battle, promised upon the shouting of the word Hau, accompanied by mesmeric passes. These unstable doctrines flourished, for a very short period of time, during the waging of the second Taranaki War.

As a dreamer the Maori is unsurpassed. He dreams both by day and at night, but it is the latter visions only which he invests with the dignity of portents. From time immemorial he has sought auguries from the visions of slumber—signs the following of which would lead him into death or preserve him in the path of life, according to the accuracy of his interpretation. But the days of tribal wars, of ambushes, and of the sudden onslaught are no more. - The visions he has still, but the Maori—the town Maori above all others—is wont to utilise them now in a sordidly commercial fashion. He will rely upon their tenor to

reveal to him the winning horse in a race—in this he becomes European at the expense of his innate poetry.

To his credit be it said, he has still his romantic lapses. He will, in his journeying through dreamland, watch the pairing together of a white brother and a white sister—nor will he scruple to tell the parties whom he has mentally contracted of the occurrence. It is a favourite dream of his—this union of slumber—in the season when no horse-races are run, and his interest in the affections of the persons concerned becomes sufficiently acute to be not a little embarrassing to the subjects of his dream.

Although so many of the Maori legends have been preserved, it is regrettable that the interpretations of the carvings upon the beams and panels of the old *whare-punis* or meeting-houses have, to such a great extent, been lost. These edifices varied not a little in degree of sanctity, a few of them being held in such reverence that decisions arrived at within the shelter of their walls were irrevocable. The walls in this case are more profusely decorated with carvings than the rest; one, for instance, can show a wonderful array of men playing long-stemmed flutes, while, curiously enough, near to these are the oft-repeated figures of a woman together with a serpent.

Upon other such buildings may be seen the form of a dragon—a vast saurian, undoubtedly. Yet Maoriland has never known a creature of the lizard species beyond the Tuatara, whose extreme length does not exceed a couple of feet. The *raison d'être* of these has,

unfortunately, never been satisfactorily accounted for, nor has anyone yet explained the allegories represented by the carven warriors and magicians, and those grotesque, narrow-bodied figures in sleepy attitudes with three-fingered hands folded upon the stomach.

Although as a race the Maoris have copied the manners of their white brethren with so much success that it would almost appear that Anglo-Saxon tastes had long been lying dormant within them, yet the truly domesticated Maori is seldom to be met with. To sports of any kind, from polo to football and boxing, he has taken like a duck to water ; but even the later generations, brought up as they have been in purely European fashion, do not appear to have imbibed the taste for the more homely virtues. Half-castes, too, in five cases out of ten, prefer the untrammelled, free-and-easy life of the pah to the greater restrictions that the white man's establishment involves. Thus it is by no means unusual to meet individuals of colouring so fair that they might well be mistaken for full-blooded Europeans living contentedly among their duskier brethren.

But whether Maori or half-caste, their tastes run almost invariably in much the same lines. As shepherds, cattle-hands, shearers, or in any similar capacity, they excel, and such careers the great majority choose ; but the few who enter menial service of any sort fall considerably below the ideal. The true Maori, although he can be

a courtier when he feels so inclined, is by nature no time-server ; the element of drudgery, too, that enters into domestic service is utterly abhorrent to his soul. To gallop after cattle and muster refractory sheep is one thing, but to be at another's beck and call and to minister to the wants of a master is derogatory to his highly developed sense of dignity. [The necessary interference with his personal convenience that the life entails is, to his mind, out of proportion to the emoluments received in exchange. If he be not free to spend an hour or so at the river in pursuit of eels—those delicacies so dear to his palate—or to discuss matters in general with a crony over a sociable but lengthy pipe, there is surely something wrong with a vocation that permits not these very modest luxuries. No, let him return to the congenial pah or to his solitary rapu hut, and when he meets a man let him do so on terms of equality, free from the sense of servitude ; even if through his retirement he sacrifice some extra comfort. But when bush-pork is to be had for the killing, eels for the catching, and *puha*, or nettle, is ready at his hand to be plucked and boiled, what more could a reasonable Maori expect ? So it is that, usually after an extremely short tenure of domestic office, the disillusioned one vacates his place, a sadder, if not a wiser man.

It may well be imagined that the few who remain at their posts, though naturally of a humbler turn of mind than the rest, are yet imbued with a

spirit the handling of which necessitates the most exact knowledge of his character on the part of his employer. His sphere of action, it is almost unnecessary to say, is confined to the duties of a rouseabout, or handy man, for odd jobs about the establishment. To picture him as a valet or an indoor servant of any kind is to stretch the imagination beyond breaking point. He is not fond of argument and will seldom condescend to contend a disputed matter, his opinion once having been given ; he will, nevertheless, most conscientiously act up to his convictions, if given the opportunity, however opposed they may be to his employer's views.

For instance, if he be directed to hasten the operation of saddling a horse when it is quite clear to him that there can be no reason for dispatch, he stands by his own views—and the master waits. Or, should he be in charge of the kitchen garden, his beloved kumaras, or sweet potatoes, will receive his zealous and undivided attention ; but it is far from improbable that other vegetables, on behalf of which his sympathies are not enlisted, will wither away and die. In justice to him it should be explained that this negligence arises not so much from selfishness on his part as from a firm conviction of the stupidity of growing any other vegetable but his native kumara. Again, if the mid-day heat prove severe and a clump of shady bush be adjacent, what better spot or time could be

chosen for a siesta, and why should oft-repeated calls disturb the dozer ? As he will explain in his quaint pidgin-English or native Maori, if he make up for lost time, who can grumble ? Liberty of action is to him all and everything ; he will not be driven, but, by judicious handling and a liberal application of flattery, he may be cajoled into almost anything.

As a man of business he is a failure. Where money matters are concerned his fund of sentiment operates, as a rule, to the detriment of his own interests. For, if his nature be stubborn, his heart is large, and he will toil twice as hard and willingly to afford an unremunerative kindness than in performing his allotted task for pay. For, however little his occupation may enable him to display them, he retains at heart the chivalrous instincts which his single-minded warrior forbears have bequeathed him ; a noble enough legacy, but, unfortunately, in these days a comparatively barren one.

The humblest Maori is in his way something of a gentleman, and pride, although a great deal of it may be of the false order, forms a large constituent of his character. He draws a far greater distinction, for instance, between employer and employed than is usual among the white population, and, although he will serve the "boss," he will, as a rule, refuse to receive orders from any humbler member of the establishment. His judgment, indeed, on this point occasionally fails

him, leading him almost to the point of snobbishness. Thus for the sheep-farmer who works with his men he has a poor regard, but the station-owner who idles he holds in the highest esteem, for surely labour is not the portion of a chief !

(Notwithstanding his intercourse with whites and his acquired religion, the Maori (with the exception, of course, of those who have studied at the colleges founded for their benefit) has divested his mind of few of the ancient superstitions. It has already been explained that there is still the evil eye to be dreaded, and that the interpretation of dreams is a matter of supreme importance. There are the evil spirits too—those accursed nightly wanderers in the mysterious darknesses of the eerie bush, to be scared away only by continuous shouting and noise. Thus, if riding on a night so dark that objects a foot distant from the eye remain invisible, be not alarmed at hearing a weird succession of cries approaching from out of the pitchy blackness ; it is only a Maori protecting himself against a possible attack on the part of these uncomfortable spirits.)

With all his petty faults of obstinacy, surfeit of pride, and an occasional lapse from sobriety, the Maori servant who understands and is understood by his master is a loyal and faithful retainer. He shares both the joy and sorrow, prosperity and adversity of the household to which he has attached himself ; and even if the latter state reduce his own

means he cares not, provided he may still form one of its humbler members. For service to those he esteems means more to him than the mere exchange of labour for money, and where his affections are there he would remain for better or for worse.



A BUSH ROAD

CHAPTER XXI

SOME COMPARISONS IN FAILURE

THE failure to enter Sandhurst, Woolwich, the Civil Service, or some other branch of official employment frequently spells exile from the home circle. In the opinion of a number of parents non-success in the competitive examinations set by the Civil Service Commission disqualifies the aspirant from any likelihood of advancement in other professions within the United Kingdom. If not for them, for the benefit of whom were the Colonies, the United States, South America, or China created?

The difficulty of parents to repress the inclination to look upon any such failures as fools must frankly be admitted. It follows that the wisest course is to discover for their offspring a locality where the ugly duckling may appear a swan by virtue of comparison with yet uglier ducklings. The first supposition is sufficiently arbitrary. Moreover, the conviction that, from the mere existence in a distant land, the youth would find diminished competition in keen brains does not rest on a sound hypothesis. Another theory, equally paradoxical, is that in so "go-ahead" a country the forward rush must drag the

fledgling willy-nilly to success in its upward vortex. Such, amongst others, are the firm beliefs of many heads of families, more especially of those who have themselves been accustomed to serve their country in an official capacity.

I take the instance of these Civil Service Commission failures because the migratory proportion of their number has been in the past admittedly far in excess of any other class. Of others in the same social position there are many, of course, who, since the days of their boyhood, have been possessed with the longing to live their lives in the more adventurous setting which the far lands over the sea afford. Again, there is the more mottled stratum of those sent abroad "for their own good"—incidentally for that of their relatives as well.

It is a goodly army, this host of passers into the newer lands. Its depôt contains an inexhaustible supply of recruits. There are few outward-bound liners that do not carry representatives of their number. They have each many bags and more portmanteaux, carefully packed by other hands than theirs. At the first breath of the sub-tropics there blooms upon each an assortment of summery garments of the latest cut—one for each day of the week. The atmosphere of the liner is a hot-house for such things. But, in the light of after-events, these immaculate coats and trousers have their pathetic lining.

We will consider one of these exiles who is bound

for New Zealand. He will almost certainly suffer from surprise at the first landing. The town is so different from any he has yet seen. Though electric tram-cars may thread the streets, there is a makeshift fence of corrugated iron here, a rough-hewn wooden shanty there. To his unaccustomed eyes the aspect of the whole is unfinished. Once up-country, the heaped mountains and foot-hills, the seared surface of even the smoother roads, the thin strip of track that winds timidly here and there—all these impress him with a new-born awe. But, his destination reached, he will have settled himself amidst his surroundings in a very short period. In fact, by the time he has realised that the best situation for the greater part of his outfit is the storehouse in the nearest township, he may consider himself thoroughly at home.

So much for his arrival. By the very crossing of the station boundaries he becomes automatically a full-blown cadet. The average status of a cadet may be summed up thus: one who either does, or does not, go out with the "boss" and the men; further—if of the first order—one who either works with the rest or plays the less strenuous part of a spectator. In the cases of the majority these are halcyon days. If the cadet be what is termed "a decent fellow," he will find that sociability laughs at distance. In addition to the club, in the township there are tennis and dancing, and in its neighbourhood picnic parties. Within a radius of a score of miles is,

in all probability, the head-quarters of a pack of draghounds, while, if polo be not obtainable, the district is an abnormal one.

But time puts an end even to the days of cadetting. The course of the initiation is over ; he is prepared—more or less fully—for what lies in front of him. If he has not done so before, it is at this point that he ponders on his prospects. There is no such thing as automatic advancement in up-country life. He may obtain a managership, work as a station hand, or buy a run of his own. Managerships are seldom enough proffered to youths emerging from the status of cadetship, while, as to the purchase of a station, the parents at home learn with something of a shock that, in order to obtain a paying concern, a capital of thousands, where they had thought only of hundreds, is required.

Thus, to many, the choice is limited in the simplest fashion. But the proportion who, at the first blush, care to turn themselves into station hands proper is not large. From a social point of view there is nothing derogatory in the proceeding. At the same time, the reflection strikes the majority with a certain amount of force that the result is a poor compensation for the premium and expenses of cadetting. Some there are who submit themselves to what appears the inevitable, and the reward of steadiness—not a particularly brilliant one—follows. There is no reason why these, after a prolonged period of hard work, should not obtain managerships in the end. They, however, on

attaining to the wisdom of experience, are given to some not unnatural wonder about the utility of their apprenticeship. They might just as well have sought a billet on the land, where, if they had obtained no wages for the first six months or so, they would have obtained their "tucker" free.

The fact cannot be too strongly emphasised that cadetship is useless for a youngster without expectation of sufficient means for farming purposes. More, it is as though one had sent a butterfly for an airing in order that he might return to the grub stage. "Roughing it," in itself, is nothing, but that the phase should arrive—without the adequate pecuniary compensation—after two or three years of the comparative luxury of apprenticeship is putting the cart before the horses with a vengeance.

The number of those who find themselves thus, with neither capital nor prospects, is considerable. A fair proportion of them work out their salvation in a way peculiar to themselves. They become neither station hands nor station owners : they compromise—as guests. The proverbial up-country hospitality is no legend. The young man will by this time have many friends ; he may stay for an indefinite period almost where he will. It is tacitly understood that he will lend a hand with the stock, and will make himself useful upon such occasions as his services may be required. He is, in fact, a glorified rouse-about, treated as a friend, and as a welcome one, until the fancy takes him to push on to the next station upon

his list. This is his programme, and thus—unless some strange good-fortune befall him—will his life be spent. With those who are overtaken by lucky windfalls we have little to do here. The ways of prosperity are tamer and far less diversified than those of the “battlers.”

It does not take the “battler” long to reconcile himself to his lot ; he is a wanderer from place to place, a vessel of many breezes and few calms. He has happy moments in plenty, but never a bed nor a bunk that he can call his own. His wardrobe he carries in his swag upon the saddle. His establishment consists of his horse and a couple of sheep-dogs. Perhaps, if grass is plentiful and friends are obliging, he may have a second nag resting within the boundaries of some station in the district. The sheep-dogs will remain the same, though the nags will not. He is continually “swapping” and dealing in the latter. Such transactions, in view of the fact that all with whom he mixes are as well grounded in horseflesh as he is, do not necessarily lead to a profitable end.

With advancing years his ways become a little more set. He will carry a larger “swag” than in the days of his early tourings. Within it will be slippers and such other aids to modest comfort as the small space of the receptacle will permit. For obvious reasons, he remains single. Conscious, perhaps, of his disabilities, beyond such intercourse as is unavoidable he shuns the other sex.

Arrived at full maturity, he is welcomed with more

general effusion at a bachelors' station than at another. At a "married" homestead the arrival of the wanderer evokes an undercurrent of resentment on the part of the hostess. She has nothing tangible to bring forward against him; his manners are good, and he possesses the knack of making himself agreeable. In certain instances the hostess will whisper to you that his influence upon Jack or Tom is—unsatisfactory. She had persuaded her husband, after so much trouble, to keep no more whisky in the house—and it is always during the wanderer's stay that the arrival of a fresh demi-john signifies a broken resolution! For the latter, *malgré lui*, is a stirrer-up of husbands.

Oh, the things that have happened on a station of the kind during a visit from such as he! The smuggling in of the spirituous jar by night, the surreptitious burial of the thing at the edge of the traitorous bush, the secret defiance of wifely authority! Then—open heresies at meals, a new jauntiness on the part of the husband, and a new laugh that would ring out in a brazen "Ho! ho!" Such are the legends whispered. They contain a portion of truth, for the guest, no doubt, introduces an unsettling element. He has a way of sending the wanton fire of bachelorhood from his own into the marital breast. Though the boon companion of the husband, he is scarcely a friend of the wife, and she knows it. Thus, unconsciously, the visitor carries domestic strife in his wake.

From time to time the desire will come upon him to alter his mode of life. Having tendered for a "bush-whacking" contract, he will live in a tent for a while, thus arriving at the nearest approach to a home of his own that it is ever his fate to know; or he will undertake to drive a "mob" of horses through to Auckland, Wellington, or some other large centre. Half a thousand horses with a man to every hundred of them, it may be. Here he will sleep where he may; if he find no bunk at nightfall, his saddle will serve as a pillow. At the termination of the contract he will have a fair-sized cheque to handle. In all probability he will buy a racehorse, and will run it at the next up-country meeting. If he win, the day is a red-letter one for his friends. If he loses, his ownership is a thing of the past, for nothing remains to him but to sell the horse.

Sometimes—once in a lifetime, perhaps—he will win his way home to England. His relatives are surprised to find how little he has "roughened," though some of their number shake an ominous head at the sight of the proportion of spirit with which he "drowns" his water, for, usually, he scorns soda. But there he is—a manly specimen, a bluff, almost military, air about him. On such occasions he may obtain a little capital. It is his boast that he knows of the finest land in either South or North Island. It is possible that he may, but it is seldom that the soil has the opportunity of calling him master.

Any money that he obtains is of small use to him.



A WATER-LILY POND

The wandering life has nipped any shoots of thriftiness that may have budded in his more youthful days. Good intentions will endure until he boards the deck of the outward-bound steamer. There, in all probability, he will meet with a couple of boon companions. The hospitable instincts of his kind will assert themselves to a fatal degree. That which commences in the smoking-room of the liner finishes in a gargantuan manner at the hotel of the district that is his destination. If anything remain over, there are plenty of good borrowers within the township. He starts upon his rounds again—he is a little silent for a week or two, and there is a fresh line upon his forehead.

Such are those who, though poorer in pocket than the most lowly paid rouse-about, live on the fat of the land. Do not for a moment fall into the error of regarding them as sycophants. If they sleep in sheets instead of a rough blanket, if they enjoy a variety of respectable *cuisines*, and the civilising influence of after-dinner music, they give their toil in exchange, and they get nothing beyond. What becomes of them after the age of fifty or so remains a standing mystery. The sight of them then is as rare as that of a dead donkey. You might conceive them human wrecks, loafing about the corners of a township; yet you will not find them there. Had they been of the kind to fall utterly in the social scale, they would have succumbed to the many opportunities of earlier days.

But if you would find the old stagers of this same army of the failed who have fallen some rungs in the

social ladder, you will not have far to seek among the shearers, among the thistle and manuka-cutters. Their payment is in hard cash—in small quantities. Their mounts are thin and jaded; they prefer the companionship of a bush “tough” or a low-caste Maori to the society of those with whom they once consorted. Yet even these, despite an air of indifference, have nothing sullen about them. Viewed from the standpoint of bricks and mortar, all that they have accomplished is the great descent of their fall. Each of them represents failure in the fullest sense of the word. At times he may consider himself fortunate if he find a couple of coins in his pocket to clink together. A clerk, wont to catch the 8.30 a.m. and 6 p.m. trains, would shudder at a life of such uncertain morrows. Yet the old stager is a free agent—so free that, could his relatives observe some of his livelier moments from their curtained rooms, they would give thanks to their fate for the twelve thousand miles that lie between. The habit of worry he has long forgotten; his horizon is bounded by the strength of his horse’s legs.

Yet, what if his lotus be a little rank! What if, forsaking in the end the haunts of whites, he sit with a dusky mate in a rickety *whare*, amidst the sharp upward heave of the mountains and the curves of the gullies beneath, with the hawks soaring in the blue sky overhead, and nothing to break the purity of the atmosphere but his own pipe-smoke! There is a companion picture—nearer home.

A shamble-footed creature in a worn, black coat, who will beg a coin of each passer-by to get to the inner lights of the bar once more—a pallid, sodden-faced spider, at whom the weakest human fly may jeer with impunity ; his home, the foulness of a London slum ! Both may have fallen from the same estate, the same public school may have known each ; but if there be a question of comparison in failure, surely the picture across the water is—shall we say ?—more poetic than this.

CHAPTER XXII

“HARD CASES”

THE term “hard case,” purely colonial, is one of the most widely inclusive and generally serviceable appellations imaginable. It may be employed in so many senses, from that of contemptuous pity, of ordinary condemnation, even to that of unwillingly extorted admiration. The individuals who fall under its dubious classification are of all grades, conditions, and temperaments, some sordid, some commonplace, others picturesque, and not a few whose lot is tragic enough.

One of the most ordinary types is the loafer pure and simple, the leaner at the street corners of the township, who will neither shear, shepherd, nor dig, but who appears to possess the fortunate art of satisfying his wants (which, to do him justice, with the exception of spirits and tobacco, are few) with the aid of extremely slight personal exertion on his own part. Not that, if you will believe him, he is at all averse to accepting employment ; on the contrary, he will be exceedingly pleased to make himself generally useful, according to his own lights, to any one

foolish or ignorant enough to engage him. It is only when conflicting definitions of time and labour come into play that he will be reluctantly compelled to resign his post.

The type is commonplace enough, and by no means restricted to New Zealand ; there are, however, various qualities in the colonial specimen of loaferdom which the English representative does not possess. The warmth and brightness of the atmosphere have lent to him, in addition to an Italian-like propensity to basking in the sun, a certain sense of the dignity of a life of ease. Servility and the appeal *ad misericordiam* form no part of his stock-in-trade. On the contrary, his manner towards his patron for the time being, is of the boisterously hail-fellow-well-met order ; he will even take an intelligent but strictly platonic interest in the latter's welfare, and will tender his advice freely, both during and after his usually short engagement. An advocate of reciprocity, he will usually, after the successful manipulation of a so-called loan, offer to treat the lender with the proceeds ; it is, however, only fair to his ideas of consistency to explain that he confidently expects the return of the compliment in kind.

This section of the large army of “ hard cases,” comparatively harmless as its members are, may provoke merely a smile of amusement, but there are other divisions of a much more formidable order. There is the professional sharper or “ spieler,” that predatory hawk who wings his periodical flights

from Sydney or Melbourne, contriving to "work" the towns and race meetings to his profit before retiring to lose his identity among the population of the larger Australian cities. There is his amateur brother, the racehorse owner of small means and smaller morality, who, with a capital of a score or so of pounds, can, thanks to the cheapness of horse-flesh in the colony, work clandestine wonders during his tour of the homely little up-country race meetings.

But there are so many varieties and types of "hard cases" that their description would fill a volume. To come, however, to the most picturesque and, at the same time, the most tragic example of the genus. In the back-blocks you will find him, far away from the townships that he dreads, and that yet, octopus-like, draw him to them at intervals with remorseless, irresistible magnetism. In the heart of bushland it is that he bears himself at his best, a healthy, wiry, sun-tanned being, fearless, and a tried comrade in those moments of sudden danger that come into the lives of every shepherd and stockman. Both with his fellow station hands and with his "boss" he associates on equal terms, and, as a rule, is equally a favourite with either. At one time or another he has probably possessed a station of his own, but his career as a run-holder is usually a fleeting one with an abrupt termination, his acres and stock snatched from him by the unsympathetic hands of the mortgaging bank.

Being of an easy, philosophic disposition, he has

grinned at the blow, writing off against the loss of his property the freedom from a responsibility which he knew was ill vested in him, and continued his life in a humbler and, in a sense, hopeless, fashion, since the desire of bettering it has gone. Watch him as, keen-faced and eager, he gallops his mount in the wake of a thundering mob of unruly cattle, and the sight is an exhilarating one enough. The horse, himself a master of the art, dashes recklessly, with blind faith and confidence in his rider, over the broken ground, fallen logs, the slippery rocks of the creek-beds, and even among the waving, tossing horns of the maddened cattle themselves. Now pressing upon the obstinate ones, and now in their turn twisting and swerving to avoid the charge of a dangerous beast, to and fro dart the horse and rider.

The long, heavy stock-whip cracks till the echoes ring again; the man's eye gleams with a light enjoyment of the tough struggle, while his voice rises sharp and clear. His wild caperings, indeed, would appear foolhardy in the extreme to one who knew not his exact judgment of the limits of his own and his horse's powers. The whole performance too, circus-like as it is, constitutes solely his ordinary work, and in it he glories. And when, the heat of the day over and his toil ended, he flings himself luxuriously on the soft, thick fern-carpet that stretches itself far and wide beneath the greenery of the bush foliage, it is well worth while joining him in

his smoke, for he can talk, and there is little of bush lore that is unknown to him.

One envies him his light indifference to the cares of life and of matters in general, but, nevertheless, he seldom smiles and more seldom laughs. If asked if he would care to see "home" again, he would probably reply that he had forgotten what it was like—that he was too well off to wish to change. In spite of this, however, one detects a substratum of melancholy that rarely actually reaches the surface of his temperament.

Meeting him thus amid the solitude of his self-chosen surroundings, it is difficult to imagine the reason of his description as a "hard case," but should you run across him during one of his periodical visits to the township that becomes plain enough. Seated dully and listlessly in a bar corner, surrounded by parasitical members of a lower grade of his own order, or lying dust-besmeared and helpless on the road, he is as sordid and unwholesome within the bounds of civilisation as he is manly and admirable away in his own wilds.

For the craze is upon him from the moment of the first sight of the township until, with figure swaying dizzily in the saddle and head drooping helplessly forward, he has collected his wits sufficiently for the commencement of his struggling journey homewards. And, as the houses fall away behind him, and the wind rustles softly among the leaves of the outskirts of the bush, he realises dimly that one more has



ON PLEASURE BENT

been added to a long list of similar episodes. But he makes no resolutions, for this is his tragedy—a thing that comes to him from time to time, irresistible as the river in flood. He is a “hard case,” and accepts the fact with resigned submission.

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I am rather loth to touch on the topic of the great sale. Its circumstances tend to throw an unfair and falsely lurid light on the life of the district. It was so unusual an event that it became in a sense historical. For at least a year afterwards it stood as a landmark of time. Such happenings as the death of a noted ram, betrothals, casual visits, floods, the births of babies, and general incidents of the kind were wont to be separated from the whirl of time by the number of days or months that intervened between them and the great date of the sale. A child had caught chicken-pox—when? Ah yes, of course, it was just ten days after the sale! And when was it that Robinson won the Waimata Stakes with that tall grey of his? Well, that was easy to remember; because it happened just three weeks before the sale! You will realise from this the importance of the event, and the necessity, however lamentable, for its chronicling.

It was, moreover, a little difficult to classify the nature of the episode. Some smiled upon it as a humorous incident; others regarded it with the gloom proper to a catastrophe. Surveyed from the

point of view of strict morality, there was, I fear, no doubt about the thing. It was a catastrophe.

As a matter of fact the circumstances were all in favour of a catastrophe, and it is a little difficult to see what else could have occurred. In the first place the sale was held within half a dozen miles of the township; secondly, the retiring owner of the property to be sold chanced to enjoy an unusual degree of popularity amidst all classes of the community; while the last and most cogent reason of all lay in the liberal policy of hospitality that provided unlimited refreshment to all comers.

There was no doubt that the sale was profusely attended. Sheep-farmers and townsmen, shepherds and shopkeepers, rouse-abouts and Maoris—many dozens of each came clattering along, whether in saddle or buggy. A few sundowners, even, scenting the occasion with the same joy with which a shipwrecked mariner sights a sail, came tramping with a sturdy eagerness on shank's mare.

Scarcely an element in the Bay was left unrepresented. The long rows of empty buggies and tethered horses were in themselves eloquent of degree. Indeed, the potential field of virtues and vices was amazingly wide!

No sale ever began under more favourable auspices. The early morning was devoted to a strict attention to business. The spirited bidding and generous prices warmed the hearts of both auctioneer and owner. A heterogeneous collection lay beneath the hammer,

everything, in fact, that the station could count, its main flocks and herds only excepted. A reaper and binder, cutting-machines, ploughs, horses, buggies, hoes, pigs, household furniture—these constituted only a tithe of the items that made up the catalogue. They were selling, moreover, in that curiously buoyant fashion that is supposed to be characteristic of hot cakes.

It was in the homestead that were bred the first germs of the mischief to come. It began in that subtle and imperceptible fashion with which the devil and some other men are wont to commence their insidious operations. To be precise, the psychological moment occurred at the selling of the piano. A sheep-farmer who added some genuine musical talent to his sporting proclivities had seated himself at the piano in order to test the tone of the instrument.

He had struggled a little with Bach and Schumann in the face of an unresponsive crowd ; even Mascagni left the majority of his audience cold. A selection of popular and sentimental songs awoke the first gleams of genuine enthusiasm. But it was the rendering of “ John Peel ” that doomed the entire sale to utter perdition. No sooner had the stirring rhythm of the grand old song burst out into full swing than the room became thronged to suffocation, and the air trembled with the sound.

Yes, a fine song, “ John Peel.” But it is thirsty work singing “ John Peel ” ! And when you have once sung it, you must sing it many times again.

More especially if it is your luck at each interval to wash down the dust inhaled by the performance through the medium of whisky provided free. This is precisely what happened at the sale, when the throats became dry. Men ran out in haste to where the demi-johns lay in the shade of the willows. They hurried back, and returned for more, at intervals that steadily decreased. It was a very hot day.

The auctioneer, nosing a whirlwind, left the piano to its fate. He went outside, and clamoured for bids for a buggy and pair that waited in readiness. Alas ! the hour for sober bidding was past. Many of the crowd had developed a rather infantile sense of inquisitiveness and enterprise. When the official exhibition of the horses in the buggy was concluded, they expressed a strong desire to see the wheels go round for themselves. A man, filled with whisky and the glamour of music, leaped on the box, and started away at a furious gallop, scattering the spectators right and left.

Inspired by the sight, two other men seized hold of a polo pony each, and began a race of their own amid a confusion of cheers. As yet others hastened to distinguish themselves in similar fashion, whether on horseback or on their own legs, the ordered circle of buyers dissolved into wild tumult.

As it happened, the auctioneer was a man of resource. Becoming aware that much was about to happen, he hastily impressed into his service two volunteer "chuckers-out," very prosperous young

Irish sheep-farmers in immaculate breeches and tweed coats. They assented with an alacrity sufficiently joyful to be in itself alarming. Then they set hilariously to work. First of all they turned out a couple of their own shepherds who happened to be present. But this was merely the playful introduction to far more strenuous feats. Within half an hour they had led away from the premises every soul, including the auctioneer himself, who displayed the least symptom of sobriety.

Even then these whole-souled masters of ceremony did not consider their duties completed. They wheedled or dragged fresh relays of musicians to the piano, producing some astonishing results in harmony, all the while the demijohns of whisky beneath the willow trees were growing hollow.

The sun set upon a curious scene. In the paddock were rows of tethered horses and free animals that wandered about where they listed in the midst of their less fortunate companions still attached to the buggies. There were pigs there, moreover, and ducks and hens, and a goat, all acting on their own responsibility.

But not a man was on his legs. There were groups of recumbent forms beneath the willows, and others in the shade of the macrocarpa trees, while the house itself resembled a bloodless shambles, the bodies stretched in the most serried rows of all in the neighbourhood of the piano.

The spectacle that this fiery scene of rejoicing

had produced was at the same time lamentable and tremendous. It was one from which many morals might be drawn. But a healthful life in the open is apt to disconcert the trend of morals coined within four walls. In this case one could have sworn that the men would have come to themselves, sore-headed, shattered in nerve, and consequently repentant. If so, you never suffered from a more grievous error of judgment.

It was a little before sunrise that life stirred again in the homestead and beneath the trees. The vital spark flowed back in no gentle tricklings ; it surged up in one great buoyant wave. The thing was done now. It was to be mourned by no bitter wreaths of humiliation. Quite on the contrary. It was to be crowned by a triumphant conclusion that would vindicate the spirit of the beginning. The hounds were brought out from the kennels, the drag was laid, and the rising sun saw a motley crowd of riders scampering full cry over the jumps. It was an heroic and very noisy finale.

As to the sale itself, there were arguments, of course, that have never been entirely cleared up to this day. There were arguments of another kind as well, and many comely female countenances set themselves in lines that were unusually severe. But then, as I have explained, the thing was unusual, and many men of the most unimpeachable character for staidness had gone down in the holocaust with the rest. It was this disconcerting blend of the

human sheep and goats that decided the ladies of the community to overlook the affair, and indeed to treat it in the end as something of a joke. Which is one of the reasons why the great sale became a matter of history.

CHAPTER XXIII

"MOLLY"

IF the following tale appears to fit oddly in these pages I regret its intrusion. Yet its presence is, I think, justified. Although the general run of its dialogue is necessarily rank fiction, the main incidents of the story are facts. They may serve no other purpose, but they will at least give some idea of the very blessed condition that is the lot of the Maoriland domestic servant.

The new cook had arrived at Mangaru station. The advent of one who held the gastronomic destinies of its inhabitants in the palm of her hand was an event of importance. As the neat figure of a girl upon a bright bay horse cantered up the pine-shaded avenue, eyes peered forth curiously from the windows of the bungalow itself as well as from those of the men's quarters.

She was a handsome, clear-complexioned Irish girl, with a bearing that lacked the coarser movements of her class. When, freed from her riding gear, she introduced herself within the bungalow, the brows of the female portion of the community went skyward

at the sight of her white drill skirt and white blouse. But the fears lest such adornment should prove incompatible with the work expected from a domestic upon a sheep-run proved groundless from the outset. Molly disposed of her allotted tasks with the ease of cheery contempt. A smile was her birthright ; but there lurked a gleam in her somewhat daring eyes that betokened a force worthy of respect.

The previous cooks of the Mangaru station had been noted for rough tongues rather than for smooth cheeks. The advent of this Venus of the pots shook the traditions of the shepherds and stockmen to their very foundations. New-born emulation rose within their pastoral breasts. Hitherto a single rusty spur upon a mud-covered heel had sufficed. Now, on either boot, shining with unaccustomed blacking, flashed a resplendent appendage of steel. Rents, long complacently regarded, became eye-sores, to be tended with needle and thread, while clothes-lines bent beneath a mightier load of drying shirts than they had ever known.

In fact, the station was in danger of becoming too “ dressy.” The very rouse-about was discovered one morning in the act of bathing in a neighbouring stream. His replies to the cross-examination that ensued were vaguely profane. Yet no doubt was possible but that Molly was the direct cause of this amazing departure from his routine.

In her spare moments Molly would recline in a chair beneath a willow that drooped near by the kitchen

door. Here, of an evening, the men would gather about her. The wooden chair had become a throne ; but she held her court with easy tolerance. The strain entailed by glib speech and “ boiled ” shirts she took as a matter of course. Her coquetry was of the passive order, and, indeed, strictly methodical. She gave out with emphasis that her cheek and waist were virginal, and would remain thus—until—— The tremor that wavered round the circle of her hearers filled the pause.

At this period visitors to the station were received with uncompromising reserve. Brother shepherds, who rode in on social bent, found themselves escorted by a chilling bodyguard away from the neighbourhood of the kitchen door. Only once was the cordon pierced. Jim Parker, a rising young blacksmith, arrived one evening, at an hour when the watch for such as he had slackened. He lit directly upon the charmed circle beneath the willow tree—a bolt from the blue !

An introduction to Molly was unavoidable. The frank surliness of its performance excelled even that of the greeting. But the sword of Nemesis fell upon the reluctant hosts. For Molly, indignant at the unseemly reception, smiled with all the greater sweetness upon the visitor. Further incensed, the rest, joining in common cause, lent to the intruder the rôle of an Ishmael. But Jim Parker, basking in Molly’s smiles, cared nothing for this.

It was in vain that the enraged station hands loosed frequent volleys of sharp-pointed hints. Jim Parker stayed on. The verbal missiles slid harmlessly from the steel armour of his determination. And Molly continued to smile. When at length he withdrew, the wonted platitudes concerning his speedy return remained frankly unspoken.

At a subsequent council of war it was decided that the repetition of such an untoward occurrence should be avoided at all costs. Jerry Maine, the head shepherd, voiced the common sentiment in a speech.

“ This contrack we’ve took on ain’t as easy as shellin’ peas. In fact, boys, it doesn’t look unlike as if gettin’ on the right side of a likely-lookin’ woman’s harder than mustering scrub sheep. All the more reason to shut out fresh entries—just when we’re gettin’ a bit blown, maybe. As we’ve begun it we’ll finish it, whichever way it goes ! ”

The rouse-about alone had retired from the contest. He had joined in the rivalry, spurred on rather by the sporting instinct that lay within him than by the faintest hope of winning the prize. But the void induced by the quenched love had been filled by a passion of resentment. His offices of drawer of water and hewer of wood brought him under the direct authority of his divinity. His leisurely habits met with a criticism unsparing enough to goad him to efforts hitherto undreamed of in his most pessimistic

hours. But it extinguished the transient amorous flame. His mutterings, the bitterer because subdued, grew deep. Both cleansing stream and willow tree knew him no more.

After many days an astonishing discovery broke upon the company.

They awoke to the unpleasant fact that in the progress of their suit they were, in fact, just where they had always been. Expected signs had not appeared. The maiden heart had flown no flag of distress.

A second council of war, the minor key predominant, was held in the wool-shed. Outside, the rouse-about who, in his own words, could see through a brick wall as well as anybody, whistled aggressively, despite the heavy load of wood beneath which he staggered.

After an interval of silence, Will Harding, the youngest shepherd, rose impetuously to his feet.

"When you has chops for breakfast," he explained, "you like 'em!"

The rest stared at the speaker in puzzled silence.

"But," continued Harding, a glint in his eye, "supposing that after you'd eaten those chops you still saw 'em on the table!"

"Man, how cuid ye do that?" inquired the Scots hand, Ian Robson, in amazement.

"Wait till I've done!" retorted Harding. "Now, as I say—supposing you saw those chops in front of you always, whether you were hungry or fed up, or half and half! Would you like 'em then?"

“ I should sling ’em away,” asserted Allenby, a third stock-hand.

“ Of course you would,” shouted the other in triumph. “ After you’d looked at ’em long enough you’d swop everyone you ever saw for a ship’s biscuit ! It’s the same with us and Molly. Here’s a lot of us makin’ ourselves as cheap as sheep in a drought. She knows she can take the pick of this little mob whenever she chooses to sort it over. As like as not, bein’ a girl of sense, she’s keeping her eyes open to see if anything else don’t come along in the meanwhile. How does that strike you, boys ? ”

“ That’s sound talkin’,” commented Jerry Maine, who made up the fourth of the party.

The others, impressed, congratulated the speaker upon his character study of the frail sex.

“ Put it to the proof ! ” continued Harding, flushed with the praise. “ To-day’s Friday. We’ll let her have her own company till Monday night. You’ll see a difference, then, mark my words ! ”

“ There’s something beyond tongue in your head, after all, Will,” exclaimed Ian Robson.

That evening Molly sat in her accustomed place. A shade of surprise crossed her face as the faint tinkle of a clock within the house chimed seven times. The grass about her remained untenanted.

Five minutes later Will Harding, bearing saddle and bridle, passed the spot on his way to the stock-yards. Within the rails four horses roamed discontentedly to and fro. The remaining plotters

followed, each granting her a nicely modulated nod as they passed. Then the four had disappeared at a canter down the track.

Hardly had the thud of the hoofs died away when the rouse-about made his appearance from the direction of the wool-shed. He was whistling the same air which he had whistled earlier in the day—in the same aggressive manner. He flung himself full length upon the grass, as though to compose himself for a nap. But Molly could discern a covert grin that lurked about the blurred feature that he was content to call a mouth.

The curves of the girl's lips straightened themselves to a rigid line. The rouse-about was a free-lance who had seized his opportunity as he found it. But in Molly's sight he lay a cipher in the intrigue. She retreated with dignity to the kitchen, her eyes shining with a light that boded good neither for her absent courtiers nor for the rouse-about. Four pairs of eyes that peered from the summit of a neighbouring bush-crowned hill sparkled as she went. A subdued chorus of triumph rose to the leafy domes above.

Harding brought his hand down upon his thigh with an exultant thump.

“ Didn't I tell you so ? ” he exclaimed.

On the morrow the duties of the station were performed with a degree of energy sufficient to cause active discomfort to the sheep and cattle. It had been decided that the day following was to mark the return to grace.

Their meetings with Molly had been acknowledged by a cheery nod on the part of each. In return she had smiled brightly back. The rouse-about, however, was seriously contemplating the resignation of his office. He had cut sufficient wood for a day's consumption in a spot that he named with gusto ; he had drawn water enough to flood the station. And still Molly, a grim smile upon her face, had cried “ More ! More ! ”

Ian Robson strode on in the van that evening as, having tethered their horses, the station hands forced their way along the cattle-track that pierced the bush upon the hill-top. As his eye struck upon the willow he recoiled with a start. Will Harding, who followed, gazed in his turn. He burst into a torrent of abuse. The remaining couple, when the time came for their eyes to serve them, stood stone-like and dumb as Ian. Far beneath them was the willow tree. Under it sat Molly—but not in the solitude they had planned. By her side, in closer propinquity than had ever been granted to any of the watchers, reclined the figure of a man !

“ That blackguard blacksmith ! ” groaned Will Harding.

Whether Molly had contrived an invitation, or whether the smith possessed the gift which directs a negro to an unguarded chicken-roost, they knew not. In a grim silence the four descended the hill which they had mounted so buoyantly. By the wool-shed they all but ran into the arms of Molly. She was

walking towards the kitchen, her colour heightened, her step brisk. Instinctively they took cover behind an angle of the building.

The rouse-about had witnessed the entire drama. He professed his sympathy in an incautious speech that was well meant, but obviously not from the heart. Thankful for a victim, the four heaped upon his meddling head a flow of invective beneath which he quailed. It was, indeed, only a masterly display of diplomacy that permitted him to retire intact.

On the following morning the sight of Molly's hack in the yards, saddled and bridled, promised to destroy the Sabbath's repose. The rouse-about alone was in a position to satisfy their curiosity. But his mood was sulkily reticent. As a precaution, therefore, they ran in their own horses, placing them in the same yard with that of Molly.

After a watchful morning they retired to their quarters for lunch. The meal was destined never to be completed. The thud from without of fast-moving hoofs sent knives, forks, and tin plates to the ground with a clatter. Arrived at the doorway, the sight of Molly cantering away down the track met their eyes. So unexpected was the move that their own horses were not even saddled.

They made for the harness-room, entangling reins and stirrup-leathers in their haste. The horses in the yard, startled by the human avalanche that bore



A STUDY OF THE GUMFIELDS

upon them, plunged and reared furiously. The shouts of the men, the rattle of the hoofs as they struck the wooden rails, the jingle of bits rejected by frightened mouths, and the loud complaints of Ian Robson, who, felled by a backing horse, went rolling among human and equine legs—all this made a fleeting pandemonium.

The first to emerge from the vortex was Allenby. Clattering through the open gate, he sped on at top speed, bent forward in the saddle. Behind him came Robson and Jerry Maine. Will Harding, whose too hastily girthed saddle had turned turtle at his first mounting, bustled along some distance in the rear.

The dust-cloud swept rapidly forward as they pounded along the curving track. After a while they caught sight of Molly. It was but a fleeting glimpse ; then she had rounded a corner half a mile ahead. By this time Will Harding, by dint of furious spurring, had recovered his lost ground. The four were racing together in a bunch.

In their turn they swept round the leafy promontory behind which Molly had disappeared. Then—Allenby pulled in his horse with so sudden a jerk that his followers, crashing blindly on to him, swept him forward again for a space, in the fashion of a wave-borne cask.

The tangle of men and horses swayed together in confusion. Then something not unlike a hollow

groan rose up from amidst the creaking of the leather and the jarring of hoofs.

To the front stood Molly's horse. It had halted by the side of another upon which sat the blacksmith. The figures of the pair formed two sides of a triangle, their heads its apex. It was the apex that constituted the outward sign of the everlasting wreck of their hopes.

The four walked their blown horses homewards. They were little addicted to self-analysis. Nevertheless, they found their mental attitude surprising. The conclusion had dawned upon them that full knowledge of the worst is lighter to bear than suspense. It was astonishing in what comforting hues the compensations for the state they had missed pictured themselves.

Shortly after their return Molly and the blacksmith arrived at the station. Their attitude was defensive and blushingly dignified. The reception awaiting them surprised at least one of the newly engaged pair. In order to demonstrate their adaptability they showered forth a wealth of congratulations. Indeed, the transparent honesty of this all but ruffled Molly's peace of mind. But Molly was a woman.

A bottle of whisky sent out from the house to mark the occasion sealed once more within their hearts that peace that had been a stranger for weeks. As Allenby remarked, in placid but unsteady tones after his fifth partaking :

“ Girls are all right—so far as they go. So’s courtin’, and so’s marryin’. But what with boiled shirts, an’ the blackin’ of boots, and the muzzle on yer mouth—it’s all of it too wearin’ for a man that’s not a flyin’ angel ! ”

CHAPTER XXIV

A PASTORAL COMPARISON

IN England the associations evoked by the term “yokel” are crude to the exclusion of all glamour. The name calls up a vision of a slumberous countenance, of torpid movements, of heavy plodding through clay or loam, or—in moments of repose—of a continued scrutiny of nothing, with eyes and mouth equally agape, from above the supporting framework of a five-barred gate.

Such, at all events, has been from time immemorial the accepted picture of the farm labourer. His existence in real life few who know the rural districts of the shires and southern counties can deny. The mien must vary as necessarily as do the features, but as a type he may stand. Indeed, though to stamp a class with a single hall-mark must work injustice to some of its members, there are few who can better bear classification beneath one pattern than the rustic.

To invoke a comparison between him and his New Zealand brother of the pastures is a matter of greater difficulty than would be supposed, in view of the similarity of their occupations. The

conditions under which they lead their lives are as diversified as the distance which separates them is great.

It is generally understood that intercourse with sheep, cattle, pigs and their kind produces a dulling effect upon the finer senses. The mere ploughing of the soil and the digging of root-crops is supposed to induce a habit of rumination that has, in the double sense of the word, no end. Whether this be the case or no, the fact remains that the agricultural labourer at home is famed rather for placid stolidity than for intellectual exuberance. Under the circumstances, it is difficult to see how his nature could be otherwise. He may grapple slowly with his work, but it is wearing labour for all that. A day of such toil, the choice between an evening of taciturn repose or of a spell of that monosyllabic conviviality that the pint pot in the village inn generates, an ill-aired bedchamber the culmination of the whole—these are no stepping-stones to the attainment of a versatile mental state.

So far as toil is concerned the New Zealand station hand has certainly no lighter task than the rustic at home. His spell of daily labour is at least as lengthy—in many cases it is more prolonged; he has less docile cattle and a wilder land with which to contend; while, so far as isolation is concerned, in order to meet a neighbour, he has frequently to ride a distance the length of which not a few inhabitants of our own counties have never traversed in their lives.

Yet to liken the colonial shepherd to the yokel at home would be to place the grasshopper alongside of the slug—a comparison that, pre-supposing the more solid qualities of the latter animal, must not be accepted in the invidious light in which it would appear at the first blush.

Perhaps the likening of a cosmopolitan to a villager would be more accurate, after all. For there is no such thing as a village, in the sense of its rural atmosphere, in the Colonies. There are townships, smaller than the most insignificant of country hamlets, that yet are fed with a continuous stream of the outer air. Within them such a being as the oldest inhabitant does not exist, from the patriarchal point of view, at all events.

Although there may be no railway in the district, its absence is more than counterbalanced by the steamers, for there are few such spots that are not within easy reach of the coast, and the steamers that bear the station-hand where his horse may not feasibly carry him are miniature liners in themselves, with all the educational attributes of the larger boats. A single trip on such a boat is surely worth, in experience, fifty railway journeys to the nearest market town!

For society upon the run the colonial shepherd has his fellow station hands. Though the class with which we are dealing is that of the shepherd born to the fleece, it is not improbable that half of his companions have passed the earlier years of their life

in an occupation widely different from that which they have now adopted, among them a number of financial wrecks, but strong barques of animal spirits yet.

It is cheek by jowl with such as these that the station hand proper exists. Should he possess leanings towards a preternatural gravity, the taste is corrected by the flavour of recklessness about him ; he either acquires fresh mannerisms or insensibly loses his own ; he hears the tales that are told, the songs that are sung, and in good time learns either art himself.

For the station-hand does not return from his work dog-weary and in search of repose : he is a fresh man in the evening, determined to make the most of his time. Yet his day has been equally arduous with that of his home brother. A good shepherd is a co-operative association in himself. He must know how to lay a line of wire fencing, he must be as well grounded in the craft of " bush-whacking " as in the minor art of cutting the feathery manuka.

Upon occasions he must display himself as an amateur saddler, while the erection of a wooden out-house should be child's play to him. As a portion of his daily labour he must force his horse up, down, and along the slopes of mountains which in the old country would be regarded as affording a stiff climb to the majority of pedestrians. As a test of nerve-power the struggle with refractory cattle, that dash wildly to and fro over broken ground, is supreme, while

as an exercise of patience the clearing of a scrub-dotted hillside of those distant white specks that are sheep is unsurpassable.

These and many other tasks are his, and it is possible that the exigencies of station life may have called upon him to perform a number of them in a single day. Yet he returns of an evening in the full determination that, if there be amusement afoot, he shall not miss its enjoyment. Visitors from a neighbouring station he will greet hilariously ; if a dance elsewhere or a game of cards be announced, he will ride in hot haste to the spot, though it be distant fifteen or twenty miles ; or, should the mood be upon him, he will start in company with his dogs upon a strenuous search for wild pig.

In temperament and experience he is to his brother in the old country that which the man of the world is to the child. Fully capable of transacting business for himself, he will have sold a horse in a tenth of the time that it has taken the other to settle in his mind whether he will part with a chicken or a pig. He is, in fact, a being of infinite resource. If a social superior affront him he will demand the reason why in no uncertain tones—not that it is in his disposition to be aggressive or jealous of social distinctions, but he has his likes and dislikes, that is all. For the rest, he takes the world as he finds it, facing it with an inward spring of life that bubbles up in a continuous fountain.

It is possible that he may be a little wild of disposition in consequence. He will gamble occasionally, and, if he become temporarily "broke," the process worries him only to an infinitesimal degree. When thirst for strong liquor appeals, he will not necessarily silence the voice that calls him to the bar of the township hotel. Perhaps it is in this respect that the difference between him and his kinsman across the seas becomes most marked. The English yokel, beer-laden, may upon such occasions as the fancy takes him stagger homeward in tranquil, though fuddled bewilderment. The colonial shepherd, whisky-driven, possesses an acuter sense of the joys of life. His deportment is that of a higher social strata; he effervesces as the topmost foam of champagne rather than stirs uneasily in the manner of its dregs. Filled with the mischief of the subaltern, the 'varsity man, or the medical student in the throes of a frolic, he expects consideration for a freak of which the spirit and he are joint authors. Moreover, he usually obtains it.

Whatever his vicissitudes, he is the arbiter of his own fate. A fall from sobriety is unaccompanied by the head-shakes of reform-urging bystanders: should he lose his worldly goods there are few philanthropic societies at whose doors he may wait—but his must be a strange personality if he possess no friend from whom he may borrow a pound note. For he has individuality; it is an asset of his, and a valuable

one. He forms no unit in that grey mass ; he suffers or gains in accordance with his deserts as a man, not as a representative of a class.

The quality of self-reliance that is so essentially his may spring from the knowledge that his existence is of greater or lesser value to the community ; or, again, it may be the utter absence of the dread of total destitution which is responsible for his independence of spirit. For, if the worst befall him, the life of a sundowner is open to him, and in that character he may remain a more or less self-respecting member of society. For the very sundowner knows not the art of whining. The tramp at home will expose the history of his misfortunes, actual or allegorical, in a tear-laden voice. He will lay bare his life for two pence, the while he casts about him a shrinking eye in dread search of unfriendly dogs. The sundowner strides towards the homestead he has determined to honour with a visit in his true rôle of wayfarer. He will demand his lodging as a right—perhaps with reason, for the lengthy observance of the custom on the part of the station owner endows him to a certain degree with such. His greeting, though amicable, will be non-committal. He might be a bluff, pastoral bagman, except that he dispenses with any responsibility affecting his side of the bargain.

Were statistics available to ascertain the proportion of youthful farm-labourers at home who have died in their old age in a better condition of life than that in which they had commenced it, the documents

would surely afford meagre reading. "Once a farm-labourer always a farm-labourer," is little short of an axiom. Nevertheless, there does not exist a shepherd "down under" who does not carry potential station owner's deeds in his pocket. To say nothing of the Government offers of small holdings on lease held out to him, promotions to the managership of a fair-sized run are as frequent as those of a clerk in a commercial office to the supervision of his branch. From the managership of a station to the dignity of the ownership of a small run is but a short step. It is one that is often taken—and frequently regretted.

It is with such possibilities before him that the station hand works, and it may be their contemplation which accounts for the absence of vacant eyes and of slouching forms. That he and the English rustic exist upon different planes is, at all events, beyond question; I think I may claim, too, that the picture has not been painted in too bright a tint upon the one hand, nor in too sombre tones upon the other. It may be urged that the home product of agricultural life enjoys his moments of pleasure, but these are few and far between, and from all appearances their potency does not go far towards compensating for their rarity. From the point of view of sterling worth it does not follow that the colonial is the better man; on the contrary, with all due respect to him, his mind has received that greater insight into social laxities inseparable from its general broadening. While Hodge has been laboriously

meditating a fall from grace, the other has already accomplished the performance—in the most light-hearted manner imaginable.

Perhaps, too, it is the more generous doses of sunlight accorded him which have helped to nourish the comparatively airy nature that is his. But whether it be that or purely the upshot of life in a younger land, the consequence is evident. The difference in temperament is already marked—a difference that has not affected in the least the qualities of race, but merely those of class. The inference is unavoidable ; the New Zealander has mounted a higher rung upon the social ladder ; the effects of the widely increased population and its accompanying exigencies that the future is certain to bring are matters for speculation alone.

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